

# *A History of African-Americans in McLean County, Illinois 1835-1975*

by John W. Muirhead



THE BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL BLACK HISTORY PROJECT  
McLEAN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS  
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In doing this research the efforts of countless people were helpful. The work of many people reveals a strong thirst for knowledge of our past and a desire to uncover and preserve it. And to make sense of it. And to revere the accomplishments of people who struggled against hard odds. I'd like to express special appreciation for the work of Caribel Washington, Lucinda Posey, Elaine and Howard Bell, Henry Brown, Oscar and Ruth Waddell, Ruth White, Kathryn Dean, Anna Sanders Clark, Wilbur Barton, Reginald Whittaker, Gwen Samuels, Lavada Hunter, and all those who have offered interviews and artifacts to the McLean County Black History Project. The early work of Wyatt Wells, Joseph Durham, and Ira Cohen and the more recent work of Ann Malone, John Baker, Scott Wagers, and Rick Williamson has been very helpful. Paul Bushnell, Mildred Pratt, and Mark Wyman have been very encouraging and have provided greatly needed advice. The McLean County

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## Introduction

This book was originally written for students. Primarily, it was intended to provide information about our community that was not widely known. It was also intended to expose students to the wide range of historical resources that are easily available to all of us and from which we can learn much about our community. Now it has been revised and expanded with the hope that it will be of interest to a wider audience.

I want to note that in this edition I've included more information on nineteenth century issues. In particular, I've quoted directly from nineteenth century newspapers. In doing this I thought the reader should see these quotations in uncensored form. That means that frequently very racially offensive language is used. I find the language very disturbing at times, and I expect that you will, also. But I feel that the direct quotes allow you to better interpret the racial attitudes of the speakers than you could otherwise.

For the twentieth century portion of this book, oral histories compiled by Mildred Pratt for the Bloomington-Normal Black History Project have been used heavily. I've chosen not to cite the sources of these interviews because of the possibility of causing embarrassment to anyone who has revealed his or her soul to an interviewer. Interested persons may listen to audio-tapes of the interviews or in some cases read the transcriptions of the audiotapes at the McLean County Historical Society Archives. Some copies are also

available at the Bloomington-Normal Black History Project Center at Illinois Wesleyan University's Sheean Library.

Manuscripts related to local African-American history are available at the McLean County Historical Society. Wyatt Wells did a pioneering work in 1938. James Malay studied the court case involving the integration of schools. Rich Williams has done research on African-American churches. Caribel Washington and Scott Wagers wrote a booklet on the history of Wayman A.M.E. Church. Wagers has produced at least two other manuscripts — one on Blacks in the Civil War and another on an archaeological dig at Wayman Church. Greg Koos and Marcia Young have done a study of the Peter Duff house in Normal. Edward Jelks has written an historical archaeology of the William Barton house in Normal. This incomplete list suggests some of the studies undertaken.

Although much research has been done, each discovery leads to more questions and opportunities for new research. I hope this will encourage you to explore this subject further.

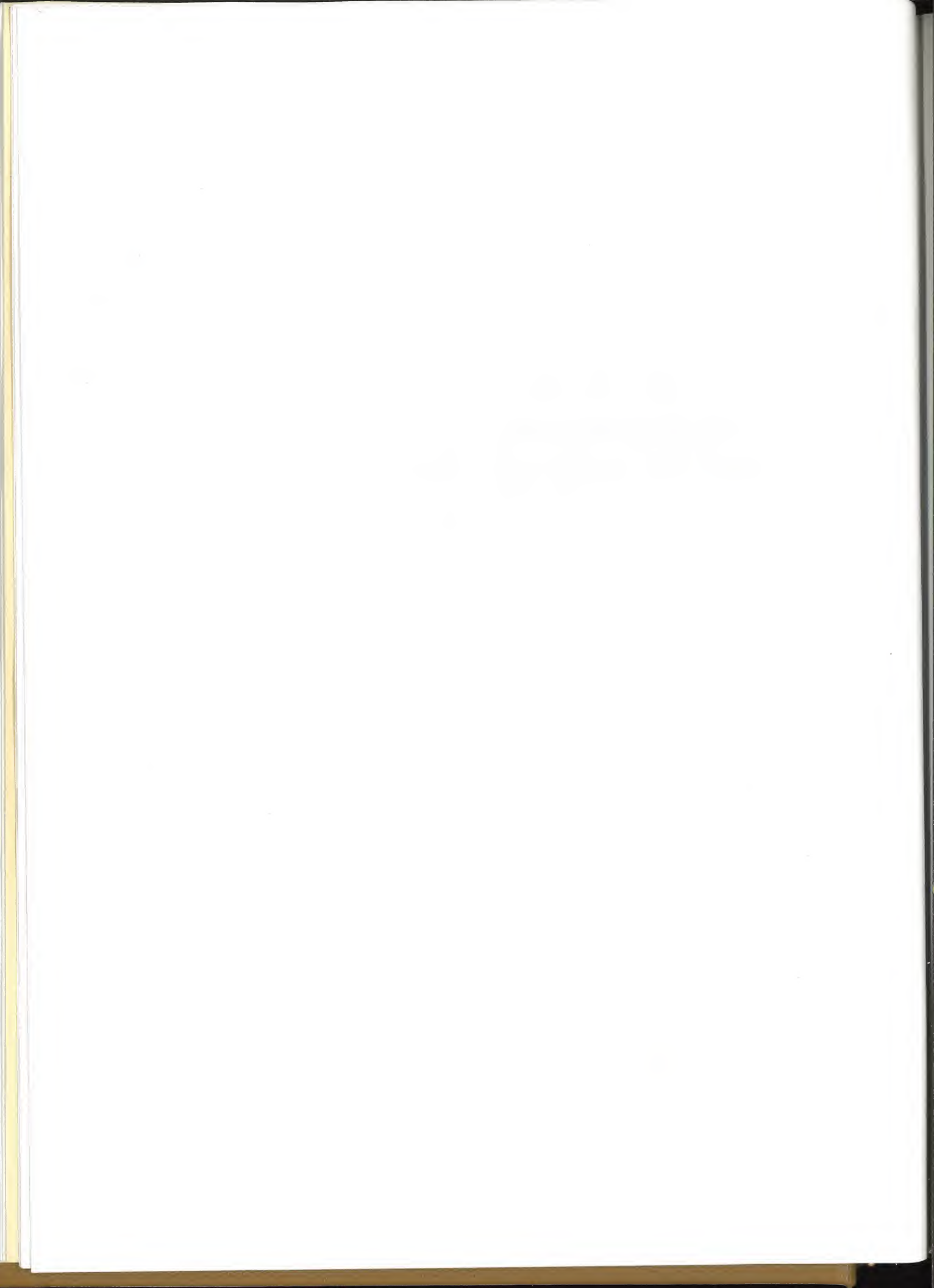
Unless otherwise cited all images are from the McLean County Historical Society collection.

J. W. M.  
August, 1997

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# Nineteenth Century

## The Place

A great American city once existed at Cahokia, Illinois, near East St. Louis. The mounds and other features that remain highly visible today tell of a complex urban civilization of the Mississippian Age that existed here in Illinois many centuries ago. An excellent museum on the site interprets this civilization and puts it in a world-wide context.

Remains of a smaller, hinterland village of the same period can be seen near Havana, Illinois in the vicinity of the Dickson Mounds Museum. Dickson Mounds is, of course, the site at which the issue of exposed burials was recently debated. North of Heyworth in McLean County a simple village of the Upper Mississippian Culture existed early in the thirteenth century. It did not appear to have a complex socioeconomic system, but one small burial mound remains (Dirks 1989:49).

The expansive prairie and intermittent savannahs and groves of central Illinois long supported a small Native American population. Then, in the seventeenth century, French explorers, priests, traders, and trappers traveled through on the Illinois River. Possibly, some of them ventured into what is now McLean County.

Apparently, the earliest recorded local event, was a battle, which took place in 1730, between French colonists and Mesquakie (Fox) Indians. In one of the worst attacks on Native Americans in the interior of North America, the Fox were driven from Illinois. Len Stelle, an archaeologist from Parkland College, claimed that only 50 of a group of 900 Mesquakie escaped the battle. A fort near Arrowsmith, which was excavated in 1989, was the likely location of that battle. Buttons, ceramics, trade beads, arrowheads, musket balls, and gun flints associated with either the French or the Fox were among the items found (*Daily Pantagraph* Oct. 26, 1989). Twenty years later, five French traders were killed as they traveled near the Grand Village of the Kickapoo near Ellsworth. A statement taken from an Indian servant of one of the Frenchmen suggests that the Kickapoo had remembered what had happened twenty years earlier to the Fox (Dirks 1989:54).

The Delaware, Pottawatomi, and Kickapoo were among the tribes living in McLean County in the early 1800s. During the War of 1812, some local Indians sided with the British. In 1813, an American,

Colonel Joseph Bartholomew, drove the Kickapoo from Old Town and destroyed their fort and village (Dirks 1989:55).

When white settlers like the Dawson family moved to the area more than a decade later, the Kickapoo leader, Macena, tried to threaten them into moving away. But Macena seemed to realize he was helpless to do anything. Later, he and John Dawson became friends, and Dawson was allowed to dance with the Indians on at least one occasion. Absalom Stubblefield of Funk's Grove respected and liked Macena, who had experienced terrible losses including seeing many of his people slaughtered at the Battle of Tippecanoe (Dirks 1989:56).

The Indians in eastern McLean County generally had friendly relations with the European-American



Nubyo Eshnogua, ca 1906



settlers. Often, individual Indians and whites knew each other. Nancy Biggs recalled playing with an Indian child named Anna at their home near Blooming Grove. They learned each other's language. John Spawr remembered that his father kept sacks of grain in their loft for his Kickapoo neighbors when they left on their winter hunting trip one year because tribes from the north had dug up their food in the past (*Supplement to Daily Pantagraph* July 4, 1881:3).

Ultimately, however, as a result of this new influx of whites, the Indians' losses were irreversible. The treaty which gave the United States government the Kickapoo land was not signed by Macena. He had not wanted to give up his tribal land, but minor leaders were found who would. Foreign disease struck the native population of Illinois just as it had so many other people of North and South America. Smallpox hit the Old Town Indians and destroyed their village early in the nineteenth century (Custer 1906).

The Native Americans living in McLean County suffered from the effects of having been displaced from their original homes to the east by other Native American tribes who had, in turn, been driven from their homes by the growing white population (Burnham 1879:6). The Delaware tribe which had once lived in the area between the Wabash and Ohio Rivers moved for a time to the Mackinaw River where they penned up their pigs, built houses modified along the building styles of whites, and placed crosses on ancestral graves (*Daily Pantagraph* Nov. 29, 1880:2). Although they were assimilating European ways, these cultural changes offered no protection against the coming of more and more whites.

Milo Custer, who as a young man undertook an intensive study of McLean County Indians, believed that there was an Indian village at Pleasant Hill until 1831 (Custer 1906). Soon after the Black Hawk War in 1832 the last Kickapoo Indians left McLean County. They were moved across the Mississippi River to reservations in Kansas (Dirks 1989:58).

In 1906, Custer visited the Kickapoo reservation in Kansas. There he hired a photographer to take photos of the descendants of the people who had once lived in central Illinois. Additional cultural changes had occurred after three-quarters of a century, but Custer's photos give us a glimpse of the people whose home we now live in. We can see from photos at the Historical Society Museum that these Kickapoo refugees had maintained many traditions, including methods of building their houses. Nubya Eshnoqua, one of the subjects of the Custer collection, had been born in

McLean County.

A diorama constructed at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield depicts a typical Kickapoo summer encampment of this period. Because written documents describing life at this time exist, this is called the Historic Period. It was the last period of Native American culture in central Illinois. Of course, trade occurred between the Kickapoo and whites. Some of the trade items can be seen in the diorama.

People of African descent came to Illinois before the arrival of English-speaking settlers. They came along with the first European colonists, the French. Some, like the well-known Jean Baptist Pointe Du Sable, were free. Du Sable came to the continent of North America from Haiti in the company of a white friend. The two of them engaged in trade in New Orleans and later in St. Louis, where Du Sable encountered racial prejudice of a kind he had not known before coming to North America. So he moved north to more isolated, remote areas. He lived for some years at Peoria before settling near Lake Michigan at what was to become Chicago. There he built a trading post where he worked for nearly two decades. Its location was ideal for the future expansion of trade.

At the time DuSable settled on the Chicago River, the American Revolution was ending. Yet, his trading post was far removed from French, British, and American settlement. However, it did not long remain isolated from the politics of these powers. Situated at the westernmost extension of the Atlantic seaboard through the Great Lakes and reachable from New Orleans by way of the Mississippi system, it attracted those eager to trade. Du Sable sold his property in 1800, and half a century later Chicago was on its way to becoming one of North America's commercial centers. Where nature had created a nearly complete transportation system, humans added the finishing touches. Canals such as the Erie and Illinois-Michigan were built. Trade flourished along the banks of Du Sable's old home.

For the most part, though, the French settled in the southern part of Illinois. A French missionary who visited five southern Illinois towns in 1750 reported that there were "perhaps 1,100 whites, 300 blacks, and some 60 red slaves or savages." At the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, there were 900 slaves out of a total population of 3,000 in French Illinois (Harris 1904:2). After Illinois came under British control as a result of the war, some of the French-speaking inhabitants stayed on with their slaves. But many moved across the Mississippi River, choosing



not to become British citizens. Although the British Parliament passed an act in 1774 that restored the French civil code to the interior of North America (Howard 1972:47), by the time Du Sable had settled at Chicago, the total French population in Illinois had declined to 1,500. Approximately one-third of these people were slaves of African ancestry.

When Illinois was organized under the terms of the Northwest Ordinance, slavery seemed to be prohibited by Article Six which began, "There should be no slavery or involuntary servitude in the said territory...." In the early days of our state, however, slavery was allowed to continue in the old French settlements.

It was also allowed to spread under an indenture system that was hard to distinguish from southern slavery. In 1803, under pressure from residents with southern roots, William Henry Harrison, delegate to Congress from the Northwest Territory, helped pass an indenture law (Howard 1972:72). In particular, the salt mines of Shawneetown used a large number of indentured slaves, who in practice could be kept for many years. In fact, Article VI of the Illinois Constitution of 1818 made provision for indentures at the Shawneetown salt works. The men indentured to work there were usually leased from slave owners in Kentucky and Tennessee (Howard 1972:132). The *United States Bureau of the Census: Negro Population 1790-1860* records 457 free persons of color and 917 servants or slaves out of a total population of 55,211 in Illinois for 1820.

Federal Census records for Illinois are available for every decade from 1820 to 1920 (except for 1890 when records were destroyed by fire). In the early censuses, only the names of heads of household are entered. Spouses, children, and slaves are not named. From 1850 to 1920, increasing categories of information are included, however. These lists, which are available on microfilm at many libraries, can be very useful sources of information about occupation, age, race, wealth, place of birth, and residence.

From the 1820 census, we learn that our state's first governor, Shadrach Bond, was a slave owner. Another slave owning politician from that early period was the bilingual Pierre Menard. This man of French-Canadian descent was elected to be our state's first lieutenant governor. In the new American state, he is listed on the Federal Census as "Peter" Menard. Perhaps his effort to assimilate helped him in politics.

For the area that was to become McLean County, there was no official history of slavery during the

French period. Yet, in the 1830 Federal Census of Tazewell County four slaves are listed. At that time, McLean County was part of an enlarged Tazewell County. Somewhere in the large administrative area that included McLean County in 1830 four people were being held in bondage by other people.

An abstract for a farm sold in 1844 revealed that there were once slave owners in McLean County. In January of that year, the farm, a half section located north of Normal, was sold to James Elliott. The price Elliott paid to the owners, Preston Laughbaugh and his wife, was "One negro slave, named Richard Conway" (*Daily Pantagraph* Jan. 6, 1911:9).

Many of the early American migrants to McLean County came from Kentucky. Some of them had held slaves there and sold them before coming to Illinois. It was often claimed that these individuals and families got rid of their slaves because of their distaste for slavery. The McLean County Historical Society Archives contain a bill of sale signed by James Miller that indicates he sold at least one slave in Kentucky before coming to Bloomington. In 1834, he sold a ten year old girl named Susan to John Bozart for \$300.00. Soon after the sale of Susan, he moved to Bloomington where one free Black male was listed living in his household on the 1840 census.

In politics, Miller was considered to have anti-slavery leanings. When he ran for state office in 1856, he was attacked by pro-slavery newspapers for being an abolitionist who had once sold slaves. Expressing a contemporary sentiment about the dangers of running for political office, the *Daily Pantagraph* leaped to his defense: "The above is another beautiful specimen of that system of political defamation to which every man subjects himself - no matter how spotless or pure his character, or what his services to his country - who has the audacity to have his name presented for any office in opposition to that pro-slavery faction" (*Daily Pantagraph* Oct. 8, 1856:2).

Another southern arrival was Harvey Hogg from Tennessee. Although he had inherited slaves, he was opposed to slavery. For a speech given when he graduated from college in Virginia, he chose the unpopular topic "The Evils of Slavery." After graduation he moved to Bloomington, and when the war started, he enlisted in the Union Army where he became an officer in the Second Illinois Cavalry. He was killed in the summer of 1862, leading his men into battle at Bolivar, Tennessee (*Daily Pantagraph* Sept. 1, 1862).

Not all transplanted southerners came north be-



cause of their opposition to slavery. J. C. Walker, an attorney from Bloomington, wrote a very revealing letter to his sister, Ellen Smith, in Haynesville, Missouri. In early 1856, he wrote apologetically for being slow to answer her letter. In addition to sickness and business travel, he and his wife were having problems raising their son. But on that score, they hoped they had solved the problem. He wrote, "We have now, however, two slaves on [sic] to attend to him and one to do the kitchen work...." He went on to express concern, though, because "In this land of free institutions they [slaves] are as uncertain as wishes [?] which often take wings and fly away" (Walker, 1856). Slavery was not legal, nor was it practiced in Illinois at this time, but Attorney Walker thought of his Black employees as slaves.

Not much has been recorded about the lives that McLean County Black residents lived under slavery. However, oral histories collected by Dr. Mildred Pratt, former Professor of Social Work at Illinois State University, have provided glimpses of the recalled slave experiences of the ancestors of contemporary residents of Bloomington-Normal. One respondent, Anna Clark, was born in 1892. Her mind was alert until her death in 1992. She was interviewed by Dr. Pratt several years before her death. Mrs. Clark knew that her enslaved father lived in the plantation Big House and was actually the son of the plantation owner. Her father had told her that his duties as a house slave were not nearly as arduous as those of the field slaves. Also, his food, clothing, and treatment were better. Although he was sometimes the victim of his mistress's anger, he mainly passed along stories that contained some humor. For instance, he recalled that one of his tasks was to stand behind the mistress and squeeze lice, as she pulled the little creatures from her hair and passed them back to him. She even did this in the presence of guests.

Being a slave, of course, was not usually such a benign existence. It was probably the case that people didn't always want to pass on the most horrible stories to their children, either to protect their children or to keep from reliving terrible experiences. Many of the stories that were passed along came from people who were very young when slavery ended. They hadn't necessarily seen or experienced the worst of it. In the first years, some former slaves came here with masters who had freed them. These people had probably not lived in typical slave conditions. There were also escaped slaves who settled here, but we have no record of their stories.

## The Early Years

When Illinois became a state, present day McLean County was part of Clark and Bond counties. Later, a reduced area was called Fayette County and then Tazewell County. When McLean County was created in 1830 out of a portion of Tazewell, it was much larger than it is today. In 1837, Livingston County was carved out of McLean. Then DeWitt and Woodford were removed from it. In 1841, McLean County took its present shape.

Near the center of what is now McLean County was a grove. In 1824, it was named Blooming Grove. Six years later, James Allin opened a store on its north edge. After McLean County was established, lots were sold on the hill near his store. This became the new county seat called Bloomington.

By 1835, African-Americans were living in Bloomington. But they had come to a state that did not welcome them. The General Assembly of Illinois periodically wrote laws that effected only Black people. These so-called "Black Codes" were very restrictive.

State laws were clearly written to dissuade African-Americans from coming to Illinois. "Black Codes," rewritten several times during the early decades of statehood, declared that a Black person had to possess a certificate of freedom and had to post bond in the amount of one thousand dollars in order to enter the state.

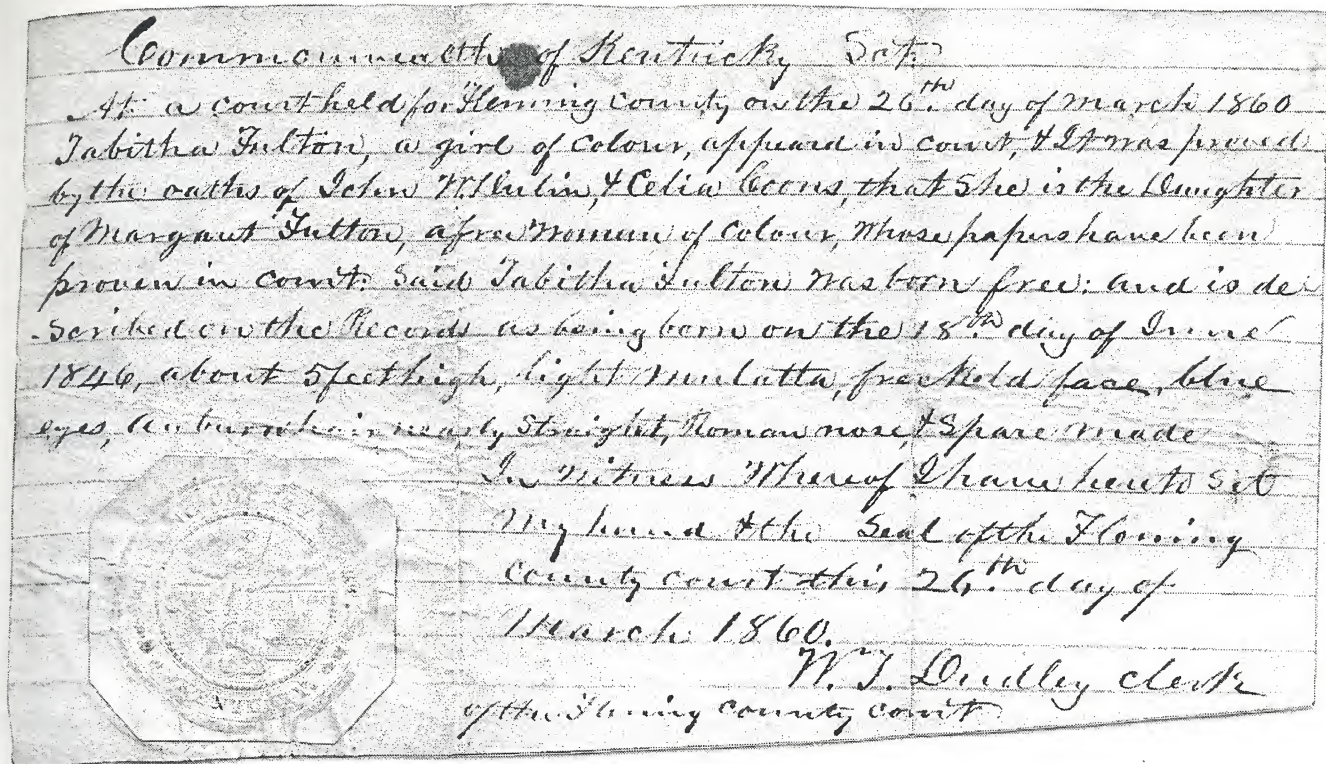
Here is a transcription of an entry made in the McLean County Commissioners Court in the June Term of 1835:

*This day William T. Major presents a bond of one thousand dollars, payable to T. B. Hoblit, Seth Baker, and Andrew McMillin, County Commissioners, and their successors in office, conditioned that a negro girl named Rosanna Johnson, late a slave in the state of Kentucky, shall not become a charge on any county in this state, & c... (Duis 1874:12).*

In addition to either presenting bond in her own name or having a sponsor do it, Rosanna Johnson had to possess a certificate of freedom from the county she had previously lived in.

The Federal Census of Christian County shows that the Major family owned slaves in Kentucky. In 1830, William Major owned eleven slaves and Ben Major seven. All of their slaves were either emancipated or





Tabitha Fulton's certificate of freedom

sold before they moved North. Presumably, Rosanna Johnson was one of William's former slaves. Ben Major moved to Washington, Illinois at about the same time William Major came to Bloomington.

The Black Codes of 1853 went further in trying to discourage African-Americans from entering the state. Article 3 read, "If any negro or mulatto, bond or free, shall come into this State, and remain ten days with the evident intention of residing in the same, every such negro or mulatto shall be deemed guilty of a high misdemeanor, and for the first offence, shall be fined fifty dollars...." The tenth article made it clear that this meant anyone who had one-quarter African ancestry would be subject to all such laws.

It appears, though, that these laws were not always upheld. In the 1850s, state law would not allow a Black man to testify against a white man. But Judge Thomas Tipton recalled one case where a Black man was allowed to testify for a Black defendant against a white man. The judge presiding over the case did not actually challenge the principle that a Black witness could not testify against a white individual. But he let the Black witness add his testimony in behalf of the defendant in this case because he was defending against "the people" (Tipton 1903).

William Wells came to McLean County from Kentucky. He traveled up the Illinois River by steam

boat. He disembarked at Pekin, which was the port of call on the west side of the river, and headed across the tallgrass prairie in a horse cart. This route was becoming the major one to Bloomington from the south.

Although it was not immediately apparent to early settlers like Wells, these southern migrants were moving into a very rich area. The prairies had been evolving since the last Ice Age and were the predominate biome of central Illinois. In this part of North America, the prairies were in a battle with the woodlands. The prairie won where there was less rainfall, faster evaporation, and sufficient prairie fires. Forbs and grasses such as prairie coneflower, prairie dock, compass plant, rattlesnake master, Indian grass, and big blue stem had created rich humus soils which would soon be cultivated by the new Americans.

Prairie gardens can be seen today along Constitution Trail near Coleen Hoose School in Normal and north of Stevenson School in Bloomington. Large areas of prairie have been established on the southern edge of Comlara Park and on the southwest corner of the Parklands Foundation south of Gridley. A four acre virgin prairie exists at Weston Cemetery, east of Chenoa off of route 24.

Oak and hickory groves were scattered throughout our county. Some were on the south slopes of moraines and others followed rivers and streams.



Many were actually open stands of scattered burr oak trees, which were adapted to withstand the disastrous effects of prairie fires. Such savannah areas are the focus of conservation effort and study today. Following white settlement, the prairie fires were stopped, and the groves naturally closed in. Today, for example, Funk's Grove has evolved into a maple stand with only a few elderly oaks still standing.

The Bloomington that William Wells came to in 1835 was built on the north edge of a large grove. Years later, he recalled the landscape and the small town which became his home (*Daily Pantagraph* Jan. 24, 1873:3). According to Wells, "The entire south hill was covered with a dense growth of timber which extended northeast across the slough...." This grove came north to Grove Street. Outside the settlement Wells remembered thick forests. The young town was made up mostly of wooden buildings surrounding the public square. A few buildings were scattered a bit farther away. Deer were hunted to the north in the area that later became Normal. Occasionally, small groups of Indians still passed through town, sometimes camping nearby.

Early central Illinois towns were typically located on the edge of groves. Wood for houses, firewood, and rail fences was needed. Plat maps often show individual land holdings that include small, narrow strips of wood lots for these uses and expansive acreage in the prairie for agriculture.

As has already been noted, we don't know much about the lives of specific early settlers like Wells, but oral histories tell us something about the variety of experiences people had in slavery. Interviews with Reginald Whittaker led to a research trip to Kentucky to try to find out more about his mother's family. Mr. Whittaker and academic researchers visited the town and site of the hotel where some of his ancestors had lived. One of the items they found was an entry from the court ledger of Scott County showing that a young woman named Francis was emancipated in 1849. She and her sister, Eliza, were both freed by their owner, John Pratt. The exact relationship between Mr. Whittaker's direct ancestors and Francis and Eliza has been difficult to determine, but there is a family connection. Mr. Whittaker believes he is a direct descendant of John Pratt.

In families where there was a biological relationship between masters and slaves, there might have been some advantages for the slaves. A fair complexion, resemblance to the owner, or a recognized relationship to a person of influence might have brought

some privilege. But there were psychological and emotional costs. Unhappy wives could mete out vicious treatment toward their spouse's slave children, as happened to Mrs. Clark's father. People were cut off from their biological families because society and the law, at that time, opposed mixed marriages. Later, some Black family members cut themselves off by "passing" for white so they wouldn't have to face the daily effects of discrimination.

Caribel Washington's search into the history of her late husband's people led to Wessyngton Plantation in Tennessee. The plantation was established by Joseph Washington, cousin to the first President of the United States. Wessyngton was a very large plantation with record books, existing buildings, and many descendants still living in the area. Especially exciting was the discovery that one, John Baker, had been collecting historical information for years. From him we learn that in 1860 the plantation had 274 slaves. At that time there were twenty-seven slave cabins. Large, extended families crowded eight to twelve people inside (Baker).

Baker's research revealed that the slaves' work week was five and one-half days. On Saturday afternoon, slaves could tend their own small tobacco plots. Some, in fact, did this and earned small savings which were very helpful after the Civil War. Mothers cared for their infants and did not return to the fields until two years after giving birth. Then the babies were cared for by an elderly woman in a makeshift nursery near the fields.

Though life at Wessyngton was not exceptionally harsh compared to the general conditions of slavery, people living there yearned to be free. They met in the woods and prayed for freedom. Or they met in cabins, where they turned pots upside down on the floor believing that this would keep them from being heard in the Big House.

Baker found reports of many problems on another Washington plantation in Kentucky. One overseer there was fired for pulling a pistol and threatening to kill a slave. Slaves ran away from this plantation on numerous occasions. They registered many complaints about beatings. Sometimes, slaves even escaped and went back to the Wessyngton place to report mistreatment.

Wessyngton Plantation became the biggest tobacco plantation in the United States. It was also famous for its hams, which were sold in the East and even in England. It was almost a self-sufficient community. Its economy fostered the development of



skilled trades. Slaves on this plantation learned to be carpenters, masons, millwrights, cooks, seamstresses, painters, and animal husbandrymen. They had skills which they could put to use when freedom came.

The story Oscar Waddell heard from his grandfather was one of painful loss. His grandfather's twin brother had been sold away, and the two brothers never saw each other again. Family separation was one of the most horrible aspects of American slavery.

Its threat, in some cases, provided the impetus to try to escape on the Underground Railroad. In 1854, one couple fled from neighboring plantations south of St. Louis through Bloomington on their way to Canada because the wife was going to be sold. We know of the case because the couple rode the train to Bloomington where there was a mix-up with their ticket. As a result, they were put off the train in Lexington and had to ask for help. After being hidden at the home of S. S. Wright three miles from town for a week, they were taken to a station south of Pontiac. Erastus Mahan, a youngster not normally involved with the Underground Railroad, witnessed their case and, later, recorded the story (*Transactions* 1899:402-403).

Escapes were not always successful. As early as 1840 slave catchers followed the Wright family all the way to Tazewell County where they captured the mother and three small children who were riding in a wagon toward Morton Township. The four were sold in open auction in St. Louis. An adult son of the woman escaped because he and another man were walking separately from the others. Jesse Wright, who later lived in Peoria and Decatur, never saw his mother again (*Daily Pantagraph* July 24, 26, 1900:3).

In another case recorded in Bloomington, a Black man came to town trying to raise money to buy his son's freedom. Tom Wright needed three hundred dollars to purchase his son and be reunited with him. The *Daily Pantagraph* urged its readers to aid his cause (April 8, 1857:3). We can only hope that he was successful. In a similar case, an African-American lecturer named J. H. Lancey spoke in College Hall to raise money for an elderly woman who was trying buy her daughter's freedom (*Daily Pantagraph* Aug. 17, 1858:3).

Although we do not know the exact reason Black families began to move to Bloomington, we can assume that they were looking for greater opportunities for themselves and their families by leaving the South. We know that one family with a number of school age children arrived in 1836 (Brandicon).

More families came in the following decade, and

many of them settled in an area on the hillside north of the present location of Central Catholic High School bounded today by Chestnut, Main, Madison, and Empire Streets. (*Daily Pantagraph* Oct. 19, 1877:4) In the 1840s, this was probably a thinly settled, racially mixed area that was reached by crossing the ditch or slough. William Wells recalled that there was, "...quite a notable stream at times, and not, as at present dry two-thirds of the time owing to the drainage of the lands through which it flows. In spring, it often swelled to the dimensions of a river and bore down cattle and hogs by the force of its current." This area would probably not have been a desirable location in 1840 or 1850. It was inconvenient to reach and, very likely, considered unhealthy because of its proximity to the slough.

Whether or not there was a deliberate effort to isolate Blacks, or they choose this location from the available possibilities in the growing town, is not known. It is interesting to note that the Irish workers who came to build the railroads in 1853 seem to have been similarly but more distantly isolated on the west side of the tracks in the Forty Acres settlement.

Two decades later, the hill north of downtown had become a desirable area in which to build. Drainage, high ground, and the recently built railroad tracks transformed this area into an ideal location for houses. To the east, Franklin Square eventually became a fashionable site. The wealthy also built houses along West Locust Street.

Although the African-American community in the 1840s seems to have been somewhat residentially isolated, the census profile suggests that these families were not isolated economically from the community. Certainly, there seem to have been more job opportunities for Blacks in the 1850s than there were at the end of the century. The jobs they held were skilled and were needed in a fast-growing town. One was a blacksmith. Another was a shoemaker, and two were barbers. A laborer, Joseph Hobson, had real estate valued above the town's median. Other Black families owned less, but most had property valued at about the level of their white neighbors.

It is hard to know how individual Black people were treated on a daily basis in Bloomington before the Civil War. Here is an example of harassment that was sometimes revealed in *Daily Pantagraph* articles. At the end of 1859, it reported that an African Festival had been broken up by a group of whites: "A party of white revelers who had been engaged somewhere else in annihilating all the rotgut whiskey they could find,



invaded the room, turned off the gas, played smash generally, and in short, broke up the frolic" (*Daily Pantagraph* Dec. 28, 1859:3).

Often the tone of reports of the behavior of Blacks, Irish, or whites who were involved in police arrests, alcohol, or both, was condescending and sometimes hostile. In such cases, Blacks and Irish were always identified ethnically by some term easily understandable to readers at that time. Whites who were connected to drinking in these cases were probably poor Upland Southerners.

A look at some of the *Daily Pantagraph* reports of Police Court proceedings provides insight into social attitudes of the dominant Yankee culture. In one case, the newspaper described a Black defendant as a person "who is in the habit of getting tipsy, and when tipsy is seized with a strong desire to 'whip a nigger'" (Aug. 2, 1862:3). In another similar case, a Black man from Clinton named Marshall May received the *Pantagraph's* usual scorn. But the newspaper was careful to point out that this drunken man was not to be confused with Marshall Nay (Nov. 12, 1859:3). Apparently, Marshall Nay was a respectable church-going member of the African-American community (Dec. 28, 1858).

Later that year, in a case in which a barber named Louis Yancey had been acquitted of charges of counterfeiting (Dec. 13, 1862:3), the *Daily Pantagraph* resorted to frightening journalism. When a letter from a Chicago engraver revealed that Yancey had successfully pulled off a con job, a writer for the *Pantagraph* threatened that there could be "a 'nigger' funeral pretty soon, and Yancey will ride in the hearse" (Dec. 31, 1862:3). Information from another case suggests that a man named Josiah Brown had actually faced a lynching party in Bloomington. The report didn't say what Brown's crime had been, but it noted that he had nearly been lynched when first taken to jail (July 6, 1858:3)." We also learn from the same article that whites and Blacks did sometimes work together successfully. Five white prisoners and Brown liberated themselves from jail on July 4, 1858.

Neighborhood disputes over small matters may have had a racial edge. Once, a Black woman named Charlotte Wells began gathering lumber scraps from the yard of Sidney Haley. Haley, who was white, became angry and started throwing bricks and clubs at Wells. The *Pantagraph* report read, "Though Haley won the battle of Tuesday, he lost the one which took place in the police office yesterday morning" (July 1, 1858:3). Soon after this case, a white man named

Peter Synder refused to let his Black neighbors use his well. First, he chased a Davis child from the well. Then, he tried to keep W. J. Davis from the well. A fight ensued in which it seems that Davis was the physical aggressor. The case went to trial with Synder being fined one dollar and Davis three dollars (Aug. 6, 1858:3). Looking at these and other cases, it seems that issues of race, class, and culture were involved in both the acts described and the reporting of them.

We know that most adult Black residents of Bloomington in 1850 had come from states in the Upper South. Seven people eighteen years of age or older came from North Carolina. Six each came from Virginia and Kentucky. One family came from New Hampshire.

Soon after arriving, these early families organized a Methodist church. The African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church had been founded in the late 1700s, by Richard Allen and other free Blacks in Philadelphia who were opposed to the segregation they faced in the Methodist Church. In 1840, as Black communities grew in the newly formed states of Indiana and Illinois, the Rev. William Paul Quinn was sent as a



William Paul Quinn (David Rabb Collection)



missionary to form churches in the growing frontier communities. Over the next several years he was very successful. Bloomington was one of those places where he established a church. There is not total agreement that 1843 marked the beginning of the Bloomington A.M.E. church, but Quinn visited members of the Black community in Bloomington that year. Early city directories give dates ranging from 1843 to 1846 as the founding date. A deed for the property exists that was signed by Moses Bird, J. W. Hill and Joseph Hobson in January of 1847 (Caribel Washington, personal communication). In 1993, the property was sold to another congregation, and the Methodists moved into a larger building on West Olive Street. The congregation had met in one location for one hundred fifty years — longer in one place than any other McLean County congregation.

The first pastor of the A.M.E. church was the Rev. Phillip Ward. He moved to Bloomington in 1842 and for more than thirty years was usually mentioned as the Methodist pastor. He was described as “a preacher of considerable ability. The possessor of a remarkably clear and sonorous voice....” (*Daily Pantagraph* Oct. 19, 1877:4). As was often the case in those pioneer days, the preacher was skilled at many things. Some of the jobs he held were commanding officer of the first public carriage, auctioneer, and white washer. At times, the church was served by others including circuit rider Araham Hall (*Daily Pantagraph* March 2, 1859).

After organizing a church, these pioneer Black families formed a school. In 1836, when the first Black family tried to send their children to a church Sunday School, there was opposition from some whites. After considerable argument, Superintendent A. C. Washburn gave in to white prejudice and taught the Black children in a separate room whenever he could spare time from his other duties. It's not known how long this arrangement continued. In 1850, twenty-one year old Matilda Davidson, who resided with the Ward family, was the teacher for the school for African-American children. Early city directories mention a “colored” school on South Madison Street. By 1860, a school for Black children had been organized by the public school board. Although the public system had been established in 1857, for three years it had neglected the Black students entirely.

Under the administration of the public school system, white teachers now taught the Black students. One of the early teachers was Mrs. Howard, a returned missionary from Burma. Interestingly, the City Direc-

tory of 1856 reported that she earned \$25.00 a month. The pay scale in the public system was between \$25.00 to \$50.00 for women teachers, and \$50.00 to \$60.00 for male teachers.

In 1862, a program presented by the “colored school” was praised at length in the *Daily Pantagraph* (July 2, 1862). The newspaper stated that the large audience was drawn out of curiosity, but that it had been very impressed with the performances it witnessed. “The colored people of this place took a rise in public opinion” was the way the *Pantagraph* phrased it. “The majority did surprisingly well. Manifesting a considerable amount of culture and a high degree of native talent.” Miss R. E. Elliott, sister of the school's teacher, received high praise for her acting and singing. The *Pantagraph* declared that the sisters should be encouraged in their work with people who had been neglected in the past. Interestingly, both women had attended Oberlin College, an institution noted for its early support of education for Blacks and women.

In the summer of 1992, volunteers worked with professional archaeologists in an effort to learn more about the church and its early community. This dig was a project in which the Midwest Archaeological Research Center provided professional archaeologists to help Wayman Church, the Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, and the McLean County Historical Society uncover past history. Participants learned the basics of archaeology — surveying sites, digging, keeping records, identifying soil types, sifting, cleaning, and identifying artifacts. They also learned about the written history of the church.

The archaeologists used a nineteenth century insurance map to help locate “out buildings” which had once existed on the church property. They were hoping to find a privy. Since there were no landfills years ago, the deep pit of the outside toilet was a perfect place to throw things that people no longer wanted.

Fortunately, a privy was found and large quantities of objects were removed from it. Especially intriguing was the collection of bottles. 173 were recovered completely intact. Over seventy percent of these were medicine bottles used in the late 1800s. Scott Wagers has shown a correlation between the dates of the medicine bottles and a high incidence of influenza and croup diphtheria in the late 1800s (Wagers 1994:16). It appears that at one time the church provided significant health care for people in the community.

One early Black resident of Illinois about whom a fair amount is known was William de Fleurville. This Springfield barber, was reported to have lived in



Bloomington for a short time. One source says he once had a barber shop in the young town (*Daily Pantagraph* Feb. 12, 1952), and another claimed he worked as a part-time butler and servant for Mr. Pickett, a Bloomington lawyer (*Daily Pantagraph* Feb. 12, 1946:8). There is a story that two of de Fleurville's lots were given to him for providing shaving service to Pickett. After Pickett's death de Fleurville lost his deed to the property. So Abraham Lincoln, a friend whom he had first met in New Salem, provided legal aid in the case. De Fleurville owned other property in Bloomington. When Lincoln came to Bloomington on business, he took care of de Fleurville's property taxes. In fact, a letter written by Lincoln requesting help in paying for de Fleurville's taxes is still in existence (Townley, 36).

Apparently the lots on the southwest corner of Main and Locust Streets in Bloomington were two of four lots the Black barber deeded to the newly formed Illinois Wesleyan University in 1867. The other lots were on the southeast corner of Locust and Center Streets. Wayne Townley states that the barber deeded the lots to Wesleyan for \$4000.00.

Before the age of railroads, river systems were the transportation routes along which cities grew. For a time, canals were built to improve and expand the water systems. But then railroads opened up the possibility of trade and commerce occurring in new areas. Towns on the rail lines grew, and towns missed by the railroads died. Individual fortunes could be made in land speculation in this rapidly changing economic environment. Bloomington residents included powerful people like Asahel Gridley who lobbied to get the railroad and profited greatly when it came.

William Wells remembered, "The first movement in favor of railroads in McLean County was looked upon with disfavor by the people." They had had discouraging experiences with bonds for the Illinois and Michigan Canal. However, when it came, people seemed to adapt quickly to the new technology. Wells said, "When the iron horse first pranced into the city,... a new and different life was intuned into the town, and the people soon learned to endure and then appreciate the benefits of the railroad" (*Daily Pantagraph* Jan. 24, 1873:3).

The Illinois Central Railroad was begun in 1851. When it was completed, it connected Bloomington with Cairo at the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to the south and with lumbering regions in Wisconsin to the north. Farm products were shipped out, and lumber and building materials brought in. Bloomington became part of a larger economy, and the most modern consumer products found their way

to the growing town. Between 1850 and 1860 the town's population grew from less than 1,600 to nearly 7,000. The Black population more than tripled to 145. Even more significantly, two thousand of Bloomington's residents were now foreign-born.

As was the case elsewhere in the United States, many Irish workers came to Bloomington and worked on the railroads. Poverty, loss of land, and the potato blight caused a great migration from Ireland. In America, these newcomers provided a large new pool of cheap labor, but their presence was often disapproved of by the Yankee community. Newspapers at the time often made the Irish the butt of their humor or expressed outrage at "drunken" Irish behavior. Signs appeared in store windows which read "Help wanted - no Irish need apply."

The Chicago Alton Railroad, which was surveyed in 1852, was completed in 1854. This company located its car shops, repair shops, and foundry and rolling mills in Bloomington. By 1872, there were 1,200 mostly skilled workers at these shops on the west side of Bloomington. Blacks did not get these jobs. When Blacks worked for the railroads, it was in lower paying, unskilled jobs.

City directories have been printed in Bloomington since 1856. They list the address and occupation of the city's residents. In the early years, they listed race. In the years of high European immigration, the Irish, frequently, and Germans, occasionally, were identified by their ethnicity. It may be that Europeans whose language and customs were different from those living in America were the victims of discrimination when they first arrived. Probably, many members of the immigrant generation continued to face some discrimination, but once second-generation Europeans adopted American language and customs, they generally were treated as full citizens with the notable exception of Germans during World War I.

Europeans were given citizenship and the right to vote almost upon arrival, and within a decade or two they were listed in the city directories without a racial or ethnic tag. The racial identity of most Blacks was noted until after World War I. Despite the denial of citizenship rights, Black people continued to try to better their lives.

Business ads placed in city directories give us a glimpse of business activity. Albert Joiner, an African-American barber, placed a half page ad in the Bloomington's first directory. His establishment was in the basement of the Ritter House. Bloomington was undergoing very rapid growth and change at this time. Joiner's ad reflected the city's modern outlook. It



**Ritter House Shaving Saloon!**  
 The subscriber takes great pleasure in stating that he has fitted up a  
**SPLENDID SHAVING SALOON**  
**Under the Ritter House,**  
 to which is added several nice rooms for  
**BATHING,**  
 which will be conducted with care and attention.  
**RULES FOR SHAVING.**  
 Every customer shaving by the month has his own Drawer, Towel,  
 Box and Sponge, and may rest assured that everything  
 will be done in city style "A No. 1."  
**ALBERT JOINER.**

Albert Joiner advertisement in Bloomington City Directory, 1856

appealed to commercial people on the move. Everything would be done in "city style" in his establishment which had just added bathing rooms and which offered an individual drawer, towel, box, and sponge for every regular customer. No other barber placed a half page ad in the first directory.

### The End of Slavery

With the growth of the cotton industry in the South, slavery continued to spread in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century. What to do about slavery and the growing African-American population became concerns in some quarters. One answer was to find a place to relocate the people whose ancestors had been captured and taken against their will from Africa. With support from Henry Clay, United States Speaker of the House, the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color was established in 1816. Soon, other colonization societies were formed. These organizations began to make efforts to transplant African-Americans to West Africa. Many of the organizers of this movement were looking for a way to remove people whom they saw as a potential problem in the United States.

The McLean County Historical Society Archives possesses a rare set of letters that gives us a look at the relationships of several families who were involved in Liberian Colonization. Ben Major was an ex-slave owner from Christian County, Kentucky. Tolbert Major, Austin Major, and Wesley Harland were once his slaves there. After he emancipated them and sent them to Liberia, he moved to Washington, Illinois. Twelve letters sent from Liberia remain. The first was sent to Kentucky and tells of Tolbert's arrival in West Africa. The tone is hopeful, but it mentions the prospect of "war with the natives".

The letters tell of life in Liberia — weather, soil, crops, and hardships. They have a nineteenth century formality, but they contain personal news about the lives and health of relatives and mutual friends. They urge other relatives or friends to come to Liberia. Some letters speak of shortages of things like paper and cloth. Ben Major sent supplies at various times, but Tolbert was concerned that some of the things sent were being stolen before he got them. Of course, letters were transported by the ships that called irregularly, and in one case a letter was not received until a full year after it had been sent. (Major 1830-1854).

The authors of these letters were thoroughly acculturated Americans who had little knowledge of Liberian life. They were part of a small group of foreigners who had been put in a place that did not want them. Armed conflict occurred in the 1840s, and the threat of attack from "the natives" was frequently mentioned. Then, in 1854, the bad news came. Tolbert had volunteered to go to Kroo Town for four months to help protect it against the native Liberians. He extended his service two more months. His wife Silway wrote, "... the natives seemed friendly and kind... the 5th of November the massacre took place and he was killed by those barbarous people" (Major 1854). Her brother was also killed in the fighting. She was left with three small children. Her tone was desperate when she wrote this last letter to Joseph Major in Kentucky.

In Illinois, Ben Major had died of cholera in 1852. His emancipation and re-colonization efforts, which seem to have been well-intentioned, ended tragically in a foreign land for Tolbert Major and his family. Generally, Black people across the United States were opposed to colonization schemes. In 1853, after the passage of another set of "Negro Laws" or "Black Codes" by the legislature of Illinois, a Convention of the Colored Citizens of Illinois met in Chicago. The first three resolutions they passed condemned colonization (Foner II 1980:60).

At the same time that the Colonization Societies were active, other Americans were demanding that slavery simply be ended or abolished. The Abolitionist activities and newspapers of William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass were known throughout the country, and an Underground Railroad was helping slaves escape to the North or to Canada.

In 1837, a small community with anti-slavery views was established in southwest McLean County. Mt. Hope was settled by Congregationalists from New England (Noble 1937:6). The colony existed until



1856. David McFarland, who was born in Rhode Island in 1824, later wrote that his community was hearing about groups who were "preaching a new gospel in Boston.... From the Brook Farm community and many another came strange new ideas. People's minds were in a ferment.... As the Puritan endeavored to establish a new England in the new world so the Yankee endeavored to transplant in Illinois a new Rhode Island.... So a colony was projected, a charter was obtained from the State" (McFarland ms). McFarland and others proceeded to migrate to southwestern McLean County where they attempted to create a utopian society.

Many secondary sources mention Mt. Hope as a station on the Underground Railroad. John Moss [Morse], Dr. Samuel Whipple, Samuel Chapin, and Daniel McFarland were Mt. Hope residents with Abolitionist views (Le Baron 1879:581). The Greens, who came in the 1840s, also aided fugitive slaves. Albert Greene remembered an incident which occurred in 1848 (Greene 1915:462). Kentucky slave-catchers came to their home and demanded information about two slaves, but his mother carefully deceived the men. Afterwards she felt tremendous guilt for having lied, but she knew that in this case the lie was

required. Thomas McFarland, whose farm property adjoined Mt. Hope, hid runaway slaves in his corn-field (Noble 1937:56). Mt. Hope Township had a number of Black residents by 1860. They might well have aided slaves to escape, too.

Mt. Hope had a short life. The railroad, which bypassed the colony, was built in 1854. The town of McLean, which was established on the rail line, grew, and Mount Hope faded quickly. Other towns in the county like Lytleville and Pleasant Hill had similar fates.

Older members of the A.M.E. church in Bloomington have been told that their church was involved with the Underground Railroad. I have found no record of this, but the church, of course, would not have publicly called attention to this activity. The case of two runaway slaves who were put off the train in Lexington may suggest how local African-Americans aided their people. When the couple was stranded in Lexington, they looked for a Black family that lived there. As it happened, that family was not home. Only then did they seek other help, which they received from the Abolitionist Mahan family. Had they found the Black family their case would probably never have been recorded. How many unrecorded incidents occurred is difficult to guess.

Runaway slaves would have likely looked to the free Black population for aid. How often people who were actively being hunted would have gone into Bloomington after it began to grow rapidly in the 1850s, seems open to question. A report of a fist-fight in 1862, identifies one of the combatants as a fugitive slave (*Daily Pantagraph* Aug. 4, 1862:3). The same year a "contraband" boy was hidden somewhere in Bloomington (*Daily Pantagraph* March 24, 1862). The A.M.E. church well could have aided in hiding this boy or others in similar situations. In any case, the Underground Railroad in Illinois was probably often an improvised and changing system (Gara 1963).

Escaping slaves sought protection as they headed north or to Canada. They took advantage of geographic factors. The Illinois River and the Mackinaw River were followed at times because of the protection offered by the woods (Morehouse 1916). This made the Pleasant Hill-Lexington area in the northeast part of the county an ideal location for fleeing people to pass through.

At Pleasant Hill in 1844, the Rev. Levi Spencer, a Congregational preacher from Bloomington, and the Mahan family did form an anti-slavery group. The Mahans were recent arrivals to Pleasant Hill from southern Ohio. In their home area, Quakers of the



McFarland house, Mt. Hope



Western Reserve were part of a major Underground Railroad network. A brother, John Mahan, was arrested at least twice for aiding slaves on their way to Canada. Shortly after his final release, he died as a result of malnourishment and illness brought on by wretched jail conditions. His arrests and death financially ruined his family.

His widow and William Mahan's family migrated from Ohio to Pleasant Hill. They were encouraged to settle there by a preacher who later drove them from the Methodist Church because of their anti-slavery views. At Pleasant Hill they were initially alone in their anti-slavery views, but they were joined by others. Owen Lovejoy, whose brother was killed for his Abolitionist work in Alton, often visited them. When Lovejoy visited in the early 1850s, his listeners were few, but more and more people became interested in the anti-slavery movement as the decade proceeded: "He [Lovejoy] was a despised and hated Abolitionist; the victim of mobs in 1850; in 1856 he was elected a member of Congress" (*Transactions* I 1899:401).

It is difficult to know the extent of Underground Railroad activity in the county. Runaway slaves reportedly passed through McLean County as they escaped, but whether or not this movement was ever on a regular basis is hard to know. Aiding fugitive slaves was secretive work. It was done in a hostile environment where the law required a person to provide information about fugitive slaves. If a slave was captured, the person faced loss of privileges, whippings, sale to distant places, more demanding working conditions, and even mutilation. No matter how bad their life might have been before, it would surely be worse after a failed attempt. Those who aided slaves could face prison and heavy fines. In McLean County, anti-slavery advocates did receive threats and were sometimes pelted with eggs. Owen Lovejoy, perhaps, was the most hated Abolitionist, and he had to flee mobs at times.

As anti-slavery feeling increased, however, pro-slavery elements could be put on the defensive. In 1862, the *Daily Pantagraph* (March 24, 1862:3) warned its readers that a slave-hunter from Cape Girardeau, Missouri was in town. He was looking for a twelve year old boy of whom the reporter was aware. The newspaper gave the slave-hunter this threat: "To the 'Southern Gent' we would say, 'The sooner you make tracks from Bloomington the better'."

Stories about aiding runaway slaves were widely told after the Civil War. In the 1840s, it had taken great courage to aggressively attack slavery. During the Reconstruction Period, it became popular to claim

association with the Underground Railroad. Stories told at this later time were often exaggerated and possibly even fabricated. So the newspaper accounts and family histories which were written after the Civil War often prove unreliable sources of information about the Underground Railroad (Gara 1963:527).

A person could be opposed to slavery, and yet hold racist attitudes. Many people who opposed slavery, did not want to live with Black people. Already we have seen that the state "Black Codes" were designed to keep African-Americans out of Illinois, and "colonization societies" encouraged the settlement of Black people in Africa or elsewhere.

When the 1853 "Negro Law" was passed in Illinois, it had an unlikely opponent in Bloomington. *The Intelligencer* reported the positions local representatives took as the bill was discussed in the State Legislature. The comments of Asahel Gridley were quite interesting because unlike many of the recorded voices of the time, he was more interested in economics than moral issues. Gridley acknowledged that he was not an Abolitionist and was opposed to the proceedings of that party, but he said that in the considerable number of Blacks who lived in his city, there was only one individual that he would wish to leave. He argued that the Black people of Bloomington were industrious, performed many services that whites were unwilling to perform, and were moral. Of the proposed law, he said, "Disguise it as you may, it would give power to make Illinois a slave state" (*Intelligencer* March 9, 1853). Gridley was not a reformer; nor was he an opponent of a source of cheap labor. Gridley's view did not prevail, and once again Illinois passed a set of restrictive "Black Codes."

Although African-American residents of Illinois could not vote and recently arrived European immigrants could, Blacks proved able and willing to organize politically across the state. "Colored Conventions" were held in 1853, 1856, and 1866 to lobby for basic civil rights and generally explore issues of concern to the Black community. The 1853 convention was held in Chicago. Most of the delegates attending were from Chicago. Other delegates came from Will, Morgan, Madison, Peoria, St. Clair, Edgar, Coles, Sangamon, and McLean Counties. This convention condemned the "Black Codes" and the numerous ways in which Blacks were denied rights. It promoted home ownership, education, formation of joint-stock companies, and ownership and cultivation of land. In all of these things women were to be helpmates of men. In very nineteenth century style, Article XXVIII read,



"She [woman] is the natural guardian of education, virtue, and good manners" (Foner II 1980:54-62).

The highlight of this convention seemed to be the appearance of Frederick Douglass. The minutes of the convention mention the immense crowd becoming impatient to hear Douglass. The *Daily Chicago Tribune* sent its reporter early to Warner Hall, but the stairway leading to the hall was already so jammed that he could not report on the speech (*Daily Chicago Tribune* Oct. 8, 1853:3).

In the autumn of 1856, the convention was held in Alton. The purpose of this convention was to work for the repeal of the state's "Black Laws." Augustus Hill of Joliet was unable to attend this meeting, but he sent his support and was appointed to the organization's "Central Committee." Gus Hill later became a lawyer in Bloomington. R. J. Robinson of Alton was a member of the education committee. His daughter, Lucinda, later married Milton Barton and moved with his family to Normal. Milton's father, William Barton of Macoupin County and later McLean County, was on the convention's executive committee. The Bloomington Methodist pastor, Phillip Ward, was on the agricultural committee (Foner II 1980:69-77).

Although some of the "Black Laws" were repealed by the state legislature in 1865, African-Americans were still denied legal, educational, and political rights in Illinois. In 1866, the convention met in Galesburg in the church of the Rev. Edward Beecher, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Again members of Bloomington's politically active community were involved. The Rev. Phillip Ward, Richmond Holly, and Samuel Witherspoon attended this meeting (Foner I 1986:250-275).

In the 1850s, slavery became a hotly debated issue in the white community of McLean County. By the end of the decade, speakers on the subject drew huge crowds. Newspapers and churches joined in the fray. The minister at the Presbyterian Church in Bloomington preached one too many pro-slavery sermons, and William Wallace pulled out of the church. He and others formed the Second Presbyterian Church of Bloomington.

The *Daily Pantagraph* was an anti-slavery, Republican newspaper. That did not mean it approved of social equality, but it was usually moderate on the occasions that Blacks were the subject of its reporting.

It certainly was not to be confused with the *National Flag*. At its most benign, the *Flag* carried stories about devoted slaves and kind masters. Their lives were happy until wicked Abolitionists came on the scene (*National Flag* June 29, 1855). In the *Flag* world view, when the slaves followed the Abolitionist, the slaves always suffered. When slaves stood by their master, they were saved. This paper once heaped praise on a visiting southern speaker who claimed slavery was good for the slave and who justified slavery by saying, "This race was the only one which was never found in any condition other than slavery" (*National Flag* Feb. 8, 1856).

Often, the *Flag* used even more inflammatory language. Reporting an alleged rape in Chicago, it said, "Hanging is too good for the demon whose black skin covers a still blacker heart" (*National Flag* Oct. 5, 1855). Events in Kansas brought forth frequent intemperate articles, and the election of November, 1856 incited rage. Owen Lovejoy was generally referred to as "the notorious Abolitionist and 'nigger' stealer."

The subsequent pro-slavery paper was the *Bloomington Times*. It was published during the early years of the and was critical of Lincoln. It was more temperate than its predecessor had been, but with the Union engaged in war, remarks like some of those published in the *Flag* would have been treasonous. In any case, the *Times* was sufficiently anti-Lincoln and anti-Union to create attention. In 1862, a mob attacked its offices in downtown Bloomington and smashed its presses. Yankee northerners and pro-slavery southerners were engaged in heated conflict.

Although today we remember the *Daily Pantagraph* and the Republican Party as being anti-slavery, there was a great deal of pro-slavery support in McLean County. In the same year that the *Flag* headlined an article "Sam Swallowed by Sambo—Africa rules North America" (Feb. 29, 1856) in reference to the influence of anti-slavery people in the newly

# The Weekly National Flag.

KE & BARKER, PROPRIETORS.

"A NATION MAY BE CONVERTED, AND YET BE FREE!"

BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS, FRIDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 29, 1856.

(\$2.00 PER YEAR, IN ADV.)

NUMBER

VOLUME 1.



formed Republican Party, Owen Lovejoy won a very slight majority of county votes.

In the 1850s, Owen Lovejoy, whom the *Flag* would have seen as the representative of "Africa," was an extremely significant political leader. Edward Magdol's biography of Lovejoy demonstrates how important Bloomington politics were in shaping his career, Lincoln's career, the character of the Republican Party, and ultimately the issue of slavery. In the Third Congressional District's election of 1856 Lincoln's friend, Leonard Swett, lost the Republican Party's nomination to Lovejoy by a small margin. Initially, Lincoln was upset, but he didn't reveal his feelings. Asahel Gridley, Isaac Funk, and David Davis clearly opposed this Abolitionist candidate from the northern part of the district. In fact, Gridley publicly called Lovejoy "a nigger thief" at a July 16 meeting in Bloomington. However, when Lovejoy spoke later that day, the audience seemed to support his active Abolitionist record (Magdol 1967:156-157).

Jesse Fell and Edward Lewis of the *Daily Pantagraph* may have been acting in their own beliefs, when they wrote, "We want in Congress men of ability and eloquence who may be relied on with perfect confidence to resist the extension of slavery. Nobody doubts that on this question Owen Lovejoy will be true as steel" (*Daily Pantagraph* July 23, 1856). They also seem to have understood the changing political climate in central Illinois.

Owen Lovejoy barely outpolled his opponent for Congress 1946 votes to 1818 in the McLean County tally. Although the county was evenly divided over the slavery issue, Republican margins were larger in Bloomington. This election moved the power of the party out of the hands of Gridley and Davis into those of people more committed to opposing slavery. The Republican umbrella was wide enough after the election of 1856 to include the views of Lovejoy, Fell, and Lincoln as well.

Abolitionist sentiment continued to grow. In 1858, Frederick Douglass spoke to an overflow crowd at the Opera House in Bloomington. Douglass was well known all over the United States. He had been born a slave, but as a child he had learned to read. Books and work on the docks made him aware of an outside world, and he was determined to leave slavery and live in a land of freedom. Following his escape, he became a highly effective Abolitionist speaker. He, like Abraham Lincoln, was born in humble circumstances, and, like Lincoln, was extremely curious and thoughtful. In fact, these two men with virtually no formal education produced much of our country's great nineteenth century

political literature. Throughout his life, Douglass continued to learn and to grow intellectually and, in fact, eventually played a major role in shaping many of the important events of nineteenth century America.

The *Daily Pantagraph* gave Douglass's Bloomington speech restrained praise. The reporter seemed most excited by his reference to the "lazy rebels of New Orleans." This remark seemed to give the reporter a chance to take a swipe at the "native sloth" of Bloomington's residents who carried with them Southern culture. The reporter did acknowledge, however, that at times Douglass "rose to eloquence" (*Daily Pantagraph* March 5, 1858).

Douglass himself wrote, in early 1859, about this western trip which included his stop in Bloomington. He noted the great change in public opinion taking place in the West: "The distance between the people and the reformer has been steadily decreasing" (Foner 1975:421). He made fifty speeches in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan and came home "fatigued, but much gratified."

Anti-slavery momentum was growing locally and nationally, but the country was shocked to learn of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. When the *Daily Pantagraph* received the news on October 26, 1859, it was hard-pressed to explain Brown's attempted revolution. It could only imagine that the persecution he had suffered in Kansas must have so blinded him that he took this "criminal" and "absurd" action. Two days later it spoke of the "insanity of the whole enterprise" as it still seemed bewildered by what had happened.

In the following days, the *Daily Pantagraph* began to exercise damage control as it railed against how the Democratic press was using the story. It also seemed to show more understanding of Brown's action. When it reported the text of interviews taken with Brown, it stressed how sane he sounded and how respectful he was (Oct. 26, 1859).

On the eve of Brown's hanging, the *Pantagraph* spoke well of Brown, but distanced itself from his method (Dec. 2, 1859:2). The next day it warned, "The inevitable and irrepressible conflict between light and darkness, between freedom and slavery grows fiercer and the irresistible current of events is sweeping our country on, whether to a precipice or to a peaceful lake, we know not" (*Daily Pantagraph* Dec. 3, 1859:2). Slavery, the most serious issue that ever faced the European and African populations of the Americas, could no longer be ignored in the United States.

In fact, Abraham Lincoln had anticipated this eventuality a year earlier. Accepting his nomination for



Senate on June 16, 1858 in Springfield, he had said, "A house divided against itself can not stand.... It will become all one thing, or all the other." Lincoln's connections with Bloomington were many. He worked for years in the little brick court house as a lawyer as he traveled the judicial circuit. He had a busy law practice. The Lincoln Papers Project under the direction of Cullom Davis has documented his heavy work load. By the 1850s, he had become a very successful lawyer. His was a frontier success story. He was not the rail-splitter living in a log cabin any longer.

Lincoln made his famous "Lost Speech" in Bloomington. He associated with the influential people of Yankee background in McLean County. Jesse and Kersey Fell aided him in getting the Republican presidential nomination. Early conversations toward that goal took place on the south side of the Court House square. As President, he nominated an old Bloomington friend, the politically powerful David Davis, to the United States Supreme Court. Support for Lincoln was especially strong in Lexington where perhaps five thousand people once attended a Republican rally. Lincoln's connections to McLean County were many.

In the election of 1860, the country was very divided. Lincoln, the Republican, was one of four candidates for President. He won the election, and slave-owning southern states withdrew from the United States. They attacked a supply depot at Fort Sumter, and a civil war was underway. Support for the Union was very strong in McLean County where 4,000 men eventually enlisted.

Although pro-slavery elements, accused Lincoln of being a Radical, he actually moved slowly on issues relating to African-Americans. But he did move. In the spring Jesse Fell wrote to Lincoln, "Ten thousand thanks, in behalf of a grateful, grateful people for your emancipation message" (Fell 1862). The *Daily Pantagraph* followed the progress of Lincoln's decision to abolish slavery in the territories in the summer of 1862. It printed lengthy excerpts of a speech by Owen Lovejoy, which was a masterful defense of Lincoln's cautious movement toward abolishing slavery. Here is a portion of Lovejoy's speech:

*Some think the butter is spread on rather thin in this resolution. But the executive rail-splitter understands his business. He knows that the thin edge of the wedge must first enter the wood. Did you ever witness the process of rail-making? The operator first takes the iron wedge, sharpened at*

*one end to a thin point, and strikes it into the wood, just so it will sustain itself, and then with the mall drives it to its head. So the executive has taken the abolition wedge, and struck it into the log of slavery, and now the heavy mall of abolition must let the blows fall till it is driven to the head and the log riven in twain. But mark, in every ugly and cross-grained or frozen wood, the blows have to be a little easy at first or the wedge flies out. It is not worth while to strike so hard as to have a rebound, for that would retard the work in the long run*  
(*Daily Pantagraph* June 30, 1862).

Lincoln continued to swing the mall. By presidential proclamation on January 1, 1863, he abolished slavery in those areas rebelling against the United States. Then, with his address at Gettysburg he revised our nation's understanding of the Constitution and provided the intellectual framework for the Emancipation Proclamation (Wills 1992). Of course, the Proclamation had, for political reasons, only abolished slavery in the rebelling states. Those border states that had not left the Union and portions of some other states were not effected by the executive order. That's why de Fleurville hoped, "Ere long, it may be universal in all states" (qtd *Daily Pantagraph* Feb. 12, 1952).

Although Black leaders had been offering, in fact, demanding to fight, Blacks were not allowed to enlist until late in the war. When the opportunity came, Black men from all parts of the county responded. An announcement in the *Daily Pantagraph* of December 2, 1863, reads, "I. R. Allen, am recruiting for that regiment (a regiment of infantry, to be composed of colored soldiers), and want all that wish to join this regiment to call at my shop and give me their names, as this regiment is filling up fast. There have [sic] nine enlisted already."

The same issue printed a letter from John Abbott reporting on the [Colored] 55th Massachusetts regiment's work at Fort Wagner and at Fort Gregg. He also raised concerns about the lack of equal treatment for Black troops, but he expressed hope. "Our motto is, that every man is born free and equal, and that equality we are fighting for. And we expect to fight with the help of the Almighty until we get it." As many as thirty-nine Black soldiers enlisted from McLean County, thirteen of whom died during their service (Wagers 1993:1).

Black troops fought in segregated units under white officers. One Bloomington man, Samuel Shaw, may have been fairly typical of these officers. In March 1864, he was appointed Second Lieutenant in





**Attack on Fort Wagner**

the Tenth Regiment Louisiana Volunteers of African Descent. The letter of appointment from the War Department directed him to report to Mississippi. His letter of acceptance revealed he was from Bloomington, twenty-four years of age, and Irish. (Shaw 1864).

Kathryn Dean's grandfather Jeremiah Williams fled slavery in Georgia and joined the Union Army. He took part in William Sherman's famous "March to the Sea." After the war, he came to Bloomington with a man named Dunn. Later, he moved to Normal where he was a Methodist preacher for many years.

Simon Malone is said to have come to Illinois with a chain on his leg. He escaped slavery and joined the Union army, but he was captured by the Confederate army. It is thought that when he escaped from the Southern army and fled to Illinois, he still had a metal cuff on his leg. However, a letter written for Simon Malone by Edward Lewis, Postmaster of Normal suggests a different story. This letter was sent to Malone's commander in the 13th US Colored Artillery in an effort to receive a pension. Malone relates that while stationed at Camp Nelson, Kentucky in June, 1865, he and four other soldiers went to a creek to wash up. Rebel soldiers attacked them and captured three soldiers. In escaping Malone suffered a ruptured vein in his right

leg. It bothered him to such an extent that he was left behind at Covington, Kentucky as his unit marched on (Lewis 1880).

In 1865, Malone built his house at 504 Kingsley Avenue in Normal. In 1981, the house burned to the ground in a suspicious fire. For a time, the Town of Normal had a commemorative plaque placed at the site of his house.

Simon Malone's new home town was in its infancy when he built his home. Jesse Fell had recently established the town. Early ordinances recorded in the town's First Minute Book reveal something of the concerns of the town's founders. One of the early ordinances reads "The sale of or the keeping for sale of intoxicating drinks ... is hereby prohibited" (*Minute Book* 37). And the town, which became famous for its trees, passed an ordinance in 1868 that prohibited anyone from hitching a horse or any other animal to any shade or ornamental tree in any street, alley, or public place. An offense could result in as much as a \$25 fine (*Minute Book* 85). Although it was connected to Bloomington by a horse-drawn rail system (*Minute Book* 48), for many decades Normal remained a small college town somewhat separate from the larger, older Bloomington.



## Time of Hope

Bloomington's African-American population grew from 145 to 235 in the decade of the 1860s. For three decades there had been only one Black church in Bloomington, the Methodist Church. Across the United States, the most common Black denominations were Methodist and Baptist. It was now time to form a Baptist church. In 1865, Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church was organized. A small frame church was erected at South Lee and Water Streets. It grew under its first minister, the Rev. Thomas Reasoner. By 1872, it had sixty members. Two decades later, in 1890, Mount Pisgah hosted the State Convention of the Wood River Conference. In the next century, the congregation began a new building program and, in 1916, moved into the church on Lee Street and Oakland Avenue.

The photo of Reverend Reasoner is one of the earliest we have of an African-American citizen of McLean County. The date of this studio photo is about 1870. Rev. Reasoner died in the mid-1870s. Eliza Reasoner's photo was taken in the same studio as her husband's. We don't know much about Mrs. Reasoner, but city directories indicate that after her husband died, she took

in laundry to support herself. For a time she and a daughter boarded at a home on North Main Street.

William Bell was part of Bloomington's growing Black population. His grandson, Mr. Howard Bell, knows that he came from Maryland after the Civil War. He was headed to Chicago, but because there was employment available in Bloomington-Normal, he settled here. His name appears in city directories in the 1870s. His first listed address was in Normal. Later, he moved to Bloomington.

In the rural areas of McLean County, the African-American population grew during Reconstruction. Within a mile or two of Covell, four large Samuel families took up farming in the late 1860s after leaving a slave past in Kentucky. Another relative followed a year or two later and settled on a farm in Dry Grove.

Today there are only fading memories of Black farm families in McLean County. Such was not always the case. In 1860, Mt. Hope had four Black farm families. By 1880, there were Black families farming in Arrowsmith, Bloomington, Danvers, Downs, Martin, and Padua Townships. Twelve year old J. Monroe worked as a farm hand in Cheney's Grove. Two fourteen year old boys, Charley Ward of Chenoa Township



Reverend Reasoner



Eliza Reasoner



and Nathaniel Stoner of Dale Township, did the same.

Two years later, Jesse and Mary Ward and their small son, Willie, moved to Bellflower from southern Illinois. Jesse Ward had worked near Bellflower earlier with threshing crews. In 1882, there were terrible floods along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers on the bottomland near Cairo. Many families were displaced. As the Ward's house became an island, the young couple moved to the second floor. They managed to save their horses on a raft that was secured against the corn crib. When the waters receded, they left the bottomlands, which were often flooded, and moved to Bellflower.

During his first two years in Bellflower, Jesse Ward was paid by the month. Then he became the manager of a quarter section of land owned by the Fairbanks family. Ward remembered those early years as being very hard because of the trouble he had hiring help. One hundred sixty acres was too much for one man to farm alone in those days. He needed seasonal help, but because he was Black and not well-known yet, he could not hire any. But he and Mary stayed on the farm for the rest of their lives as their family and acreage grew (*Daily Pantagraph* Aug. 6, 1927:B-1).



Jesse and Mary Ward

Occasionally, Blacks became involved in small business ventures. The Holly family printed and posted bills in Bloomington. In the growing city, there had become a need for this new service. City directories of the 1870s list George and Joel Holly as bill posters. Marion Holly was a pressman, and James Holly a book binder. It's interesting to note that James Holly had been farming in Mt. Hope before the Civil War. In the following years, many other farm families made the same migration from nearby small farming communities into Bloomington and Normal.

During Reconstruction, Black barbers worked in Heyworth, McLean, Lexington, Chenoa, Bellflower, LeRoy, Danvers, and Normal. In Bloomington, barbering had been a major occupation for Blacks for decades. In the small towns, very often the only Black family in town was the barber's family. In 1880, William Hill and George Jacobs were barbers in Heyworth. Lenora Smith was a hairdresser, and her husband, Daniel Smith, was a barber in Lexington. In Chenoa, Edward Taylor was barbering. Bellflower's barber was B. Anderson, and McLean's was David Smith. Earlier, Danvers and LeRoy had Black barbers. All of these barbers cut white people's hair.

Since at least the time of the first State Colored Convention the African-American community in McLean County had been developing a political consciousness. On another front, they held an annual celebration that helped forge emotional ties with people of African descent throughout the Americas. In the late 1850s, members of the African Methodist Church began celebrating the emancipation of slaves in the West Indies. Called Emancipation or First of August Celebrations, the obvious purpose of these events was to call attention to the abolition of slavery in the nearby Americas. Added to that was a frequent emphasis on racial uplift in the United States. Issues relating to the condition of free Blacks provided topics for many speakers. Edward Joiner combined these themes when he urged his listeners "to improve themselves in knowledge and dignity of character, as an essential means to realizing their aspirations in emulation of their brethren whose era of self-government dates from 'the date we celebrate'" (*Daily Pantagraph* Aug. 1, 1859:3).

Also, these events initially served as fund-raisers for the church. Dinners were served with the proceeds going to pay off building debts or preachers' salaries. Locally, Joseph Hobson, William Wells, Henry Crow, Henry Wells, J. Hill, and later Richard Blue were among the frequent organizers of these celebrations.



The Rev. Edward Joiner and the Rev. Phillip Ward were often main speakers. Parades, martial music, banners, picnics, and speeches were usually part of these days of fellowship. During Reconstruction, whites like politician and Civil War veteran John McNulta often spoke.

The African-American community must have eagerly looked forward to these events. Church members like the Wells brothers would place an announcement in the newspaper. Picnics were held at different locations such as Major's Grove (1859), Cottonwood Grove (1862), or the Fairgrounds (1874). In the evening, the crowd might reconvene at a concert hall in Bloomington and entertainment and speeches would continue (*Daily Pantagraph* Aug. 11, 1874:4). Visitors and speakers from neighboring towns would attend. Contacts and friendships with people from Pontiac, Atlanta, Lincoln, Decatur, Peoria, Champaign and Springfield would be renewed.

*Daily Pantagraph* articles in August, 1881 show how much visiting, sharing, and activity continued to take place around this freedom celebration. Decatur seems to have celebrated first that year with main speakers from Mattoon and Bloomington (Aug. 2). Champaign's day was attended largely by citizens of eastern Illinois and western Indiana (Aug. 3). The Rev. C. S. Smith of Bloomington "carried the audience by storm" in Peoria the next day (Aug. 4). He spoke again in Pontiac where the celebration observed not only emancipation in the West Indies, but in the United States as well (Aug. 5).

A tragedy occurred the same day that showed the degree of regional interest in these observances. The *Daily Pantagraph* reported that on her return from the event in Pontiac, Mrs. Escue of Normal had her arm severed as she slipped getting down from the train. Mrs. Escue, who was ninety, had traveled to and from Pontiac with her son Isaac that day to take part in the celebration (Aug. 5, 1881:4).

An original poster from the Atlanta Festival of 1875 suggests several interesting aspects of this celebration. The Atlanta poster was headed "Emancipation Proclamation" and was held on September 22, which was the date of Lincoln's preliminary announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States. The date of the event remained close to that of the earlier celebrations of emancipation in the West Indies, but it shows that there had been a shift in what was being remembered. Everyone was invited; it was a racially mixed event. The Chicago and Alton railroad offered discount round trip fares to people

traveling to the picnic. That made travel from Springfield, Lincoln, and Bloomington more likely. The Illinois Midland Railroad offered half fares from Decatur and Peoria. These train discounts would have made it easier for speakers like Edward Joiner of Bloomington to travel to this and other celebrations and would help explain the large attendance at emancipation remembrances (Atlanta Historical Society).

First of August celebrations were carried on in central Illinois, at least, until 1900. That year Champaign hosted a large event that was advertised as being for "the colored people of the Thirteenth congressional district." People from McLean County attended, and the featured speaker was the Chicago newspaper publisher T. Thomas Fortune (*Daily Pantagraph* Sept. 19, 1900:5).

In 1870, Congress finally recognized African-Americans as citizens of the country they had lived in for so long. And after passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, Black men across the nation received the right to vote. David Strother voted in El Paso. Strother was a Civil War veteran who fought with an Illinois regiment and came to El Paso after the war. To earn a living, he, too, became a barber. He had little formal education, but he was respected for his "excellent shelf of especially good books." In April, 1870 after waiting for the judges to decide that he had the right to vote, Strother cast his vote in the city election.

El Paso had a charter which allowed the town to hold its city election one day earlier than other towns did. Therefore, the claim was made that he was the first Black voter in the nation as a result of the Fifteenth Amendment (*El Paso Story* 1954:295). During the centennial year of his historic vote, his memory was honored by the El Paso Boy Scouts.

The *Daily Pantagraph* reported the elections in Bloomington, Lexington, and Clinton on this landmark occasion. One white man complained that Blacks were voting. When he learned that it was their right, he declared he'd never vote again. In Clinton, apparently the Democratic Party "opened the saloon" to the fifteen Black voters. The correspondent from Clinton wrote, "men who had opposed all their lives not only negroes voting, but their liberty as well were foremost in courting the negroes for their votes" (*Daily Pantagraph* April 4, 1870). However, after watching the vote take place and the celebration that followed, this same reporter concluded that it was now time for a Sixteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote, too.

Just two days earlier, Susan B. Anthony had been in Peoria debating a professor over that very issue.



She may have debated effectively (*Daily Pantagraph* April 2, 1870), but women would have to wait another half century to attain suffrage.

When African-American men participated for the first time in the city elections of 1870, they were continuing a long involvement in politics. They were elated to now be formally participating in the political process. In April, a group of local men, some of whom had been active in the State Negro Conventions, met at Wayman A.M.E. Church and passed this resolution:

*Whereas, we, as people of color, deeply feel the embarrassing circumstances under which we have for so long been compelled, and are still compelled, to toil; feeling, as we do, that our condition as a people can best be elevated by such a change in the constitution and laws of our country as shall guarantee equal rights before the law, and as the State Constitutional Convention, now in session in this State, have adopted the Fifteenth Amendment, which gives to every man 21 years of age, without regard to color of condition of servitude, his equal political rights: therefore, be it Resolved, That we express, in some appropriate manner, our sincere thanks and esteem for the men and party who were the means of carrying the Fifteenth Amendment into effect... (Daily Pantagraph April 6, 1870).*

*Daily Pantagraph* coverage of African-American political and church events after the Civil War was informative and straight forward. Once again, there was a second newspaper. This time it was the *Bloomington Democrat* carrying the racist message. It reported a festival of the Color Guards at Royce Hall at which one of its white opponents was "talking religion with 'Brother Crow'." The article described other conversations which were recorded in heavy pseudo-Black dialect (*Bloomington Democrat* Aug. 22, 1872).

The *National Flag*, *Bloomington Times*, and *Bloomington Democrat* were all short-lived newspapers whose purpose regarding racial issues was clear. Their appeal was to ignorance and prejudice. They printed stupid jokes and recounted absurd examples of human behavior in an attempt to maintain themselves and their race in a position of power and unfair advantage. They made no attempt to appeal to reason, law, fairness, or common sense.

Following the Civil War, one of the major areas of

concern for African-Americans continued to be education. Recently established Illinois State Normal University was founded by and administered by liberal reformers. Its second president, Richard Edwards, was clearly a supporter of equal educational rights. So, it was no surprise that a Black girl applied and was accepted to the Model School in 1867.

However, since Normal University was a state-supported institution, its action was subject to attack. The *Chicago Times* screamed, "Here is an institution supported at great expense by the taxpayers of Illinois, and run in the interest of 'nigger-radicals'" (Harper 1935:111). Closer to home there was also vocal opposition to the admittance of the Black girl to the Model School. A vote taken in the town of Normal showed that local support for integrated schools was very great, though. Out of a total of 101 voters, only seven wanted a separate school and two opposed her admission outright. All of the other voters felt she had the right to attend the Model School (*Daily Pantagraph* May 7, 1867:4).

The Black student who applied to the Model School at Illinois Wesleyan that same spring must have assumed that he would be accepted, too. A prominent letter writer to the newspaper claimed he was intellectually one of the brightest of Miss English's students, and the Methodist church, the religious group which supported Wesleyan, had a strong record of opposition to slavery (*Daily Pantagraph* May 11, 1867:4). However, the Model School of Wesleyan College delayed a decision to admit the student. Its college president seemed to avoid the issue by referring the case to the Board of Trustees. (May 15, 1867:4). Faculty members appeared to support his immediate acceptance, but the hesitant attitude of the university president seems to have discouraged the student from pursuing admittance at that time.

Early in the period of Reconstruction, Black citizens expected greater equality for themselves and their families. Three years later, fortified by the encouragement of their pastor, Black parents tried to enroll their children at School #5 which was located at West (now Roosevelt) and Walnut Streets. This newly built school was much closer to the children's home than was the Black school. Miss Sarah Raymond was the principal of School #5. The superintendent of schools, Mr. S. M. Etter, prevented the two children from entering the school (Tate 1972:41). When the children insisted upon attending #5, school officials built a shack behind the school for them.

In Danvers, too, Black children were excluded



from school, perhaps, by a teacher from the South who imposed his racial views. The teacher in question was not rehired because the County Superintendent said he failed his examination. But in an election called by the school directors, the townspeople voted to build a separate school for the Black children (*Daily Pantagraph* Jan. 26, 1872).

These cases were discussed in the press. The *Democrat* was vehemently against integrated schools: "How is it now? Instead of embracing the opportunity to learn in a school kept up at considerable expense, exclusively for their benefit, they have been induced to demand admission into the other public schools" (*Democrat* March 20, 1871). This, of course, neglected to acknowledge that the "school" in question was nothing more than a shack.

Circuit Judge Thomas F. Tipton held hearings and ruled against the segregated school. It must have taken courage on his part to make the decision because not even the Republicans were united in support of integration. He turned the argument that the *Democrat* had made to his favor, though. He said it was a fraud upon the taxpayers to maintain two separate buildings (Tate 1972:42-44).

The cases from Bloomington and Danvers went to the Illinois Supreme Court which ruled in 1874 that the Black children must be allowed to attend school with the white children because there was room for them. To provide separate schools would create unnecessary taxation. Although the schools were integrated, the argument over "separate but equal" schools had not been at issue.

Politically, the Republican Party had come to count on the support of the Black community, but in 1878, a meeting in Royce Hall produced a document which declared that Black voters would be independent participants in the political process. It revealed a strong consciousness of race and class interests as it spoke of ridding ourselves of "political slavery," and resolved "... to cooperate with such men and favor such measures as we believe best for the interests of the colored people and men who make their living by labor." One of the signees and speakers was George Augustus Hill (*Daily Pantagraph* March 27, 1878). Another of the speakers was Richard Blue. The meeting attracted 125 people, and a committee was formed to look after the welfare of the city's Black citizens.

Hill was from Joliet, Illinois, where he began his career as a barber. He came to Bloomington and opened a shop, but he also attended Illinois Wesleyan University's law school. After graduation, he was ad-

mitted to the bar and established a successful law practice in Bloomington. He also became involved in politics and was an effective Republican campaigner. Although he had broken from "political slavery" a few years earlier, in 1885 he returned to the Republican Party and got the support of the *Daily Pantagraph*, which approved of his opposition to the leading Black Democrat, the Rev. C. S. Smith. At age thirty-nine, Hill became the first Black man elected to political office in McLean County (*Daily Pantagraph* April 9, 1885).

C. S. Smith was a notable figure in Bloomington during the 1880s. The *Pantagraph* regularly reported on his speeches and activities. For instance, he "criticized" or critiqued the work of literary groups at Illinois Wesleyan University (Dec. 11, 1880:2). He spoke at churches and special events throughout central Illinois. While pastor of the Methodist church in Bloomington, he began the publication of church and Sunday school materials that would become widely used by A.M.E. churches throughout the United States (*Daily Pantagraph* Dec. 8, 1880:3). Later, he was appointed commissioner for the State of Illinois at a cotton exposition at New Orleans (*Daily Pantagraph* Sept. 30, 1884:3).

When President Chester A. Garfield was shot soon after taking office, Smith joined other Bloomington ministers in expressing his personal grief and that of his congregation. He warned that "Socialism, communism, and Ingersollism must be suppressed." His comments were much like those of the pastors of the major churches in Bloomington, and they were given the same prominence (*Daily Pantagraph* July 4, 1881:2).

Before the election of 1884, a Colored Club for Blaine and Logan was organized in Normal. The newspaper reported that Normal's Black community could turn out about 100 voters (*Daily Pantagraph* Sept. 24, 1884:3). Anderson Duff was named president of the group. Richard Blue was one of its organizers. A month later, the Colored Glee Club of Normal sang at another Republican meeting. Normal's growing Black population seemed to be staying in the party of Lincoln and Fell.

The growing political involvement and, perhaps, the independence of the Black population of Bloomington seem to have helped gain a patronage position. In 1885, the city voted to add a "colored" policeman to the force. A vote was taken and Hezekiah Tolls, who had been a driver for two prominent white families, was chosen (*Daily Pantagraph* May 23, 1885). Other Black men were appointed to the police force before the end of the nineteenth century. Jacob Dean was appointed in the early twentieth century when the



derby-style helmet was worn.

Economically, the opportunities for work did not change much during and after Reconstruction. In 1880, Normal had twenty-seven Black laborers, fourteen servants, and no one was listed in the census as having a specific skilled job. Bloomington, on the other hand, had a wider range of occupations in 1880. Women washing clothes, laborers, servants and cooks were common occupations, but there were also four whitewashers, a grocer, a blacksmith, a merchant, a lawyer, a machinist, a civil engineer, two store clerks, three clergymen, and a scattering of workers holding other jobs.

In the following two decades, the number of African-Americans doing skilled jobs in Bloomington decreased. Meanwhile in Normal, in 1900, there were twenty-three laborers, thirteen servants, and eight washerwomen. But the number of skilled workers increased to three carpenters, two tinnerns, two paper hangers, and a fireman.

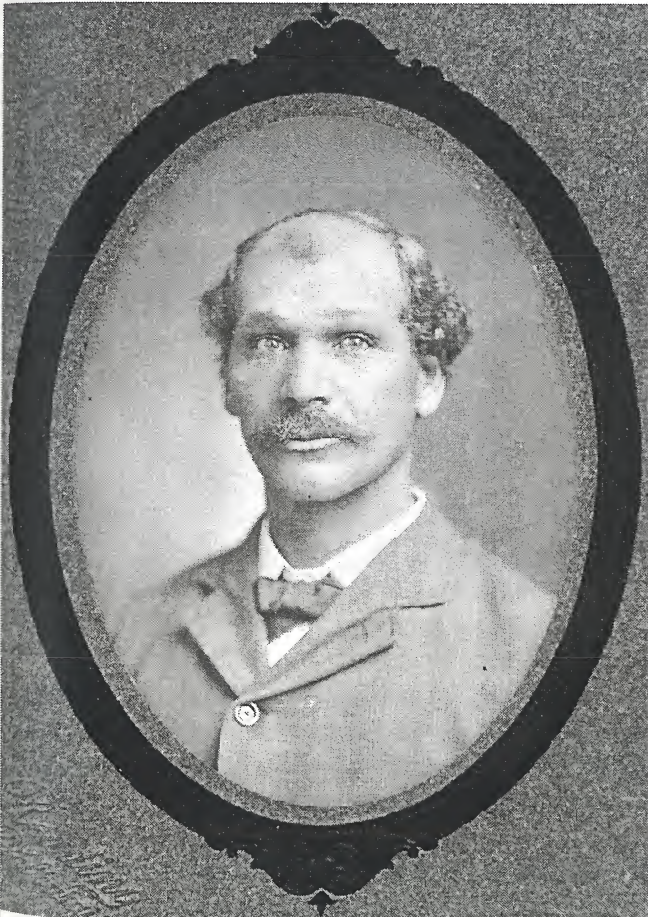
Normal was growing and developing a class with surplus money. As a result, new jobs were created. In the Black community there were many families in

which both husband and wife worked for wages.

Among Black workers, one person each was listed as butler, porter, steward, seamstress, caterer, and "baseballest" in the 1900 census. There were also five teamsters and four coachmen — jobs that hadn't appeared in Normal in 1880.

Blacks in Normal generally lived in two racially mixed neighborhoods. One cluster of homes was located between Fell Avenue and the railroad track, north of Locust Street. The other cluster was between Cherry Street and Willow Street, east of Linden Avenue. At the turn of the century most Black families in Normal owned their own homes. Seventy percent of the households were either owned outright or were in the process of being purchased. Many of these homes are now gone because they were small homes which were built more than a century ago on land close to a state university. Though virtually invisible by the mid-twentieth century, Normal had a thriving African-American population at the end of the nineteenth century.

The father of one of these middle-class Normal



Peter Duff



Duff house, 107 W. Popular, Normal, Illinois

families was Peter Duff. Duff came here from Kentucky and worked for Jesse Fell. He became a carpenter by trade and built a house for his family. The Duff house has been studied thoroughly, and its kitchen was used to create a major display in the "People" exhibit at the McLean County Court House Museum. Peter Duff built his house in a modified shotgun style about



1883. As he became established and prospered, he undertook a major renovation of the house. The changes reveal the Duff's awareness of latest styles and use of space. Dr. Marcia Young, site superintendent of the David Davis Mansion, finds similarities between the Duff house and the Davis mansion. Decorative Queen Anne styles were added to the Duff house at this time. A room for growing and displaying plants was created. Family private spaces and public spaces had become important developments in middle class homes. Duff also added indoor plumbing and a cistern pump in the kitchen.

In 1915, Duff made another set of changes. At this time, he was a concrete-form worker. Often he was away from home for long periods, working on bridges or large construction projects. Whether this was a better opportunity or a job change necessitated by closed labor unions and a deteriorating racial climate in Normal is not totally clear. However, the house took on a plainer arts and crafts bungalow look at this time. The foundation was redone with cement block (Koos and Young 1993).

Fannie Duff, Peter's wife, was an immaculate housekeeper. A neighbor recalled, "I can remember coming to this house as a child. It would smell so nice with waxes and polishes and cleaning things." This family which achieved respect in a difficult economic and social environment placed heavy emphasis on hard work, thrift, and learning. The Duff family recorded births, deaths, and marriages in their Bible. Peter Duff also kept other records including minutes and budgets for the Bethel A.M.E. Church of Normal.

Milton Barton also worked for Jesse Fell. Barton's descendants tell that his ancestors were of Cherokee heritage and that they were victims of the Indian Removal Act of 1830 which allowed 100,000 Cherokee and Seminole people to be coerced from their land and driven across the Mississippi River between 1830 and 1840. In the forced marches, countless people died of starvation. One of Barton's sons was named Osceola Barton, probably after the well-known resistance fighter of the racially-mixed Seminole tribe.

Milton Barton came to Normal from the Alton area. His mother's people had been forced to leave their lands in the southeast. They stopped in Illinois where his grandson says the Indians were treated well in the communities of Blacks and Irish immigrants. His paternal grandparents were free Blacks from Kentucky. The family lived for a time in Alton and Upper Alton. The family of Lucinda Robinson, who was

African-American and Irish, moved to Alton from Missouri. She and Milton were married in Edwardsville in 1857.

Family history states that Milton Barton came to Normal to plant trees for Jesse Fell. Fell dreamed of filling the prairie fields of the university with trees, and Barton was his landscaper. He also planted trees along many of Normal's streets. The beauty and benefits of their endeavors are still enjoyed by I.S.U. students and Normal residents.

Archaeological research paints a picture of what was nearly a small farm around his son's house in Normal. William Carey and Cynthia Barton's big yard was filled with food. There were fruit trees and a garden. There were hundreds of chickens. At one time, pigs were slaughtered in the backyard. The remains of bones cut with a saw reveal the slaughtering practices used. Cynthia kept very busy gardening, canning, cooking, washing, ironing, and caring for a family of ten children.

The relationships the Duffs, the Bartons, and other Black families had with Jesse Fell was an important one. In an interview taken in 1916, George Brown states:

*No account of Mr. Fell's service to his community could be complete without mention of his unremitting efforts for the colored people of Normal. He secured work for them, employing many himself, and then showed them how to save and invest their earnings in homes, encouraging them to educate themselves and their children, and constituting himself advisor and friend in their struggle for betterment. Largely as a result of his interest in them the colored people of that community have become as a class self-respecting and property-owning citizens (Morehouse 1916:108).*

George Green, a Normal barber, was appointed baseball coach of the I.S.N.U. team in 1897. He was expected to bring experience to the team. The college yearbook of 1897 states that this year, "The board of control has obtained the services of Mr. George Green, who knows baseball." It commented on the discipline he instilled in the team (*Index* 1897).

It is surprising to find that a Black college baseball coach was hired at the turn of the century. Although in earlier decades nationwide Blacks had been involved in integrated baseball, by the end of the century segregation had become entrenched in professional baseball. The state university hired its next Black coach, Will Robinson, to coach basketball three-quarters of a century later in the 1970s.

In the late nineteenth century, Normal boasted Bethel A.M.E. Church and a Christian Church.





I.S.N.U. baseball team, 1897

There may have been an Adventist Church, and there definitely was a Sunday school. The photo below is thought to be of the meeting place for the Union Mission Sunday School. One resident, who attended when she was a small girl, remembered that her mother and the other women cleaned the room in the morning, went home and changed clothes, and attended the Sunday school in the afternoons. Union Mission closed in 1905, while the other black churches in Normal lasted until about the 1920s.



Union Mission Sunday School

In 1900, the Town of Normal had 253 Black residents out of a total population of 3,795. Bloomington, on the other hand, was six or seven times larger with a Black population of only 599. The photo of Lura Eyestone's first or second grade (on following page) class shown on the steps of one of Normal's elementary schools late in the century shows a very integrated school.

## Increasing Racism

A *Daily Pantagraph* headline and article on August 17, 1895 stated that a lynching had taken place at Lexington. The article finished with, "It is thought that an attempt will be made before morning to take Smith out and lynch him." Examination of the newspaper in the following weeks revealed no more news about the incident. The lack of restraint shown by the *Daily Pantagraph* that morning must have caused a great deal of fear and distress for Black people in the county.

This headline appeared in a period of open racism and of "yellow journalism." The *Daily Pantagraph* repeatedly carried headlines about lynchings and murder elsewhere in the nation at this time. The lynchings were often of African-Americans. We know from the work of Ida B. Wells that horrible crimes were committed on an unthinkable scale for much of a forty year period in the United States. Terrible violence occurred, and the local newspaper covered the front page with "Maimed in Collision," "Kills Indians for Revenge," "Negro Lynched," "For Assaulting Negroes," and "Four Men Lynched." These were the stories of the summer of 1895. Violence was more common in the South, but the North was not immune to it. In Spring Valley, Illinois, the Black community was attacked by mobs angry because of a labor dispute. In Ohio, an accused murderer was lynched before he had a chance for a trial.

Some of the victims in these cases had committed crimes. But often this act of violence was used to terrorize people into submission. It was not uncommon for a person who had acquired some wealth or tried to exercise political rights to be accused falsely and murdered by a mob. Whether the victim had committed a crime or not is irrelevant, of course. The presumption of innocence until proven guilty and the right to a jury trial are two of our basic rights as Americans. Guilt or innocence must not be decided by mobs.

Around the turn of the century, Bloomington's Black population began to grow more rapidly than it had for two decades. The largest number of migrants came from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. Increasingly though, people from Mississippi and Arkansas were coming to Bloomington. Employment opportunities were mostly in menial jobs, but they paid cash wages. Violence and the harsh conditions of sharecropping pushed people North.

In Bloomington, many of the newcomers rented rooms or homes. Those who owned their own homes





Lura Eyestone's first or second grade class in a Normal elementary school in the 1890s

were often families who had lived here some time. Many people lived "in service" in their employers' homes just east or west of the downtown area or along North Main Street.

This information comes from the Federal Census and Bloomington City Directories. The 1900 census includes addresses and whether or not a living unit is rented or owned. Lists of Black residents and their addresses, which are available at the McLean County Historical Society, have been compiled for many nineteenth century years. Random checking of those lists suggests much more renting and mobility in Bloomington than in Normal.

One place Black men could find work was in the coal mines. Coal had been mined in Bloomington since the 1870s at a mine on West Washington Street. The number of Black men working there increased to twenty in the late nineteenth century. Some of these men came from the South, but a few had migrated into Bloomington from rural areas in the county. In the ru-

ral areas the number of Black farmers was decreasing. John Doage of White Oak was the only African-American barber in McLean County outside of Bloomington-Normal in 1900.

At the turn of the century, Bloomington had fewer Black skilled workers than did Normal. In other respects the employment profile in Bloomington was similar to Normal's. The number of coachmen, cooks, and servants was increasing rapidly. Many women were wage earners. There were twenty-seven African-American women who washed other people's clothes for income.

Following the Civil War, a wealthy class of whites had developed in Bloomington. They maintained large homes and active social lives, and Black men and women began working for them. Sometimes the Black servant, cook, butler, or coachman lived in the white family's home away from their own family. One oral history informant reported that she went to live with and work for a white family when she was



just twelve years old.

At the end of the nineteenth century our country went to war and many of McLean County's Black men went off to Cuba. African-American troops did not get much publicity for their efforts, but they played an important part in the Battle of San Juan Hill in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Black soldiers with ties to Bloomington were among those who took the hill.

The all-Black 8th Illinois Volunteer Infantry was made up heavily of Bloomington men. This regiment went to Cuba after the war. White soldiers had been removed because of the heat and difficult conditions. The soldiers from Bloomington pulled garrison duty at Camp Marshall near San Luis. An historian of the war maintains that the Illinois soldiers were considered especially effective. It was felt that the soldiers of the 8th Illinois did an outstanding job of maintaining good relations with the Cubans (Gara 1972). The Souvenir Edition of the *Bloomington Journal* of 1917 lists at least 36 McLean County men as having served with the Illinois 8th in the Spanish-American War.

Julius Witherspoon of Bloomington was a Captain in the 8th Illinois. Witherspoon wrote home telling of the condition of his men. He said that initially they had poor provisions and problems with malaria. With the onset of the dry season and improved camp condi-

tions, the health of the men was good. He was concerned, though, that false reports had been circulated about his troops. He assured the people of Bloomington that they were performing their duties well.

Unfortunately, when these men returned home after serving their country in Cuba, they faced a hostile racial climate. At Pana and Virden there was a labor dispute in the mines, and the governor of the state had threatened to turn Gatling guns on the next Black "strike breakers" who entered Illinois (Gara 1972). By 1900, decades after the war which brought about the abolition of slavery and the progress made during the Reconstruction years, Illinois appeared to be no more hospitable toward Black people than it had been in 1818.

At century's end Bloomington was devastated by a huge downtown fire. A highly combustible cleaning agent caught fire at a cleaning shop on Monroe Street, near East Street. Wind pushed the fire toward the Court House, burning everything in its path. The beautiful block, which exists today north of the Court House, was built in the aftermath of the fire.

Ike Sanders came to Bloomington just before the turn of the century. After working for wealthy families for a time, he opened a restaurant on South Main Street in Bloomington. He had settled in a changing Bloomington. As he and the city entered the new century, he would face old obstacles and new opportunities.



Captain Julius Witherspoon



Ike Sanders



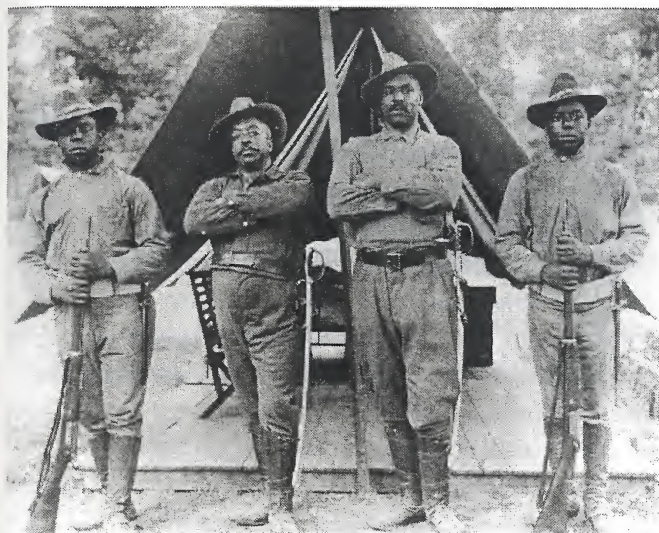




## Twentieth Century

### A New Century

After a year of military service in Cuba, the 8th Illinois Volunteer Infantry returned to Bloomington at the turn of the century determined to enjoy equal rights with their fellow American citizens. The photo below of Carl Stearles, Captain Matt Stearles, Lieutenant "Ike" Witherspoon, and Willie Stearles was taken about 1910. Matt Stearles and Witherspoon had served on garrison duty in Cuba during 1899. After the war, the 8th Illinois Infantry remained active as part of the National Guard. In 1901, the *Daily Pantagraph* reported that a recruitment drive for new volunteers was going well (*Daily Pantagraph* July 2, 1901).



Members 8th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

The soldiers, who left Cuba feeling proud of their service and achievement, returned to a country that was torn apart by racial violence. At the 1903 Wood River Sunday School Convention, Illinois Baptists passed a resolution which deplored, "The recent disregard for law and order, north as well as south." This disregard was called "a blot upon the fair name of our beloved country and a disgrace to the Christian religion" (*Daily Pantagraph* July 11, 1903). Newspapers at the turn of the century were filled with accounts of lynchings of Black men who were in jail awaiting trial and even of men who had not been charged with a crime. There were attacks on African-American communities. Whole communities, at times, were attacked because of suspected criminal activity on the part of individuals or



Bloomington policeman Archie Walton and others (Eloise Walton collection)

because of strike-breaking activities.

Politically, Black men continued to work within the Republican Party. At a meeting of Black Republicans in 1900, Matt Stearles was chosen to be one of two representatives for Black voters to the party's county central committee (*Daily Pantagraph* March 22, 1900). Although no one since Gus Hill had been elected to political office, some influence over patronage jobs was achieved through this type of party involvement. City directories reveal that Frank Thomas and Julius Witherspoon held positions on the police force in the 1890s, as did John R. Ford, Jacob Dean, and Archie Walton in the early 1900s. In Normal, L. B. Anson began a long career as a postal worker around 1907. The 1910 Federal Census shows that barber Richard Blue, who had been active in politics since Reconstruction, was employed as doorkeeper at the State Capitol in Springfield.

Dr. Eugene Covington ran unsuccessfully for city council in 1912. In discussing the election, his son remembered that people posing as his supporters attended his meetings to gather information for his



opponent. In 1922, Abraham Stevenson campaigned for assistant supervisor. One of the speakers on his behalf seemed unaware of recent history as he claimed, "It is the first time in the history of Bloomington that the colored people have ever had an opportunity to vote for one of the race." And the local newspaper predictably chose to highlight and support the remarks of a participant who "offered some kindly advice to the men on the subject citizenship" (*Daily Pantagraph* Feb. 21, 1922). Around 1932, a Negro Democratic Organization was formed in Bloomington. A Black dentist, Dr. Charles Thompson, initiated the drive to establish the organization. Lucinda Brent, secretary of the project, recalled insults and physical threats, but many Black voters switched parties as Franklin Roosevelt grappled with the Great Depression.

In Normal, there was a large African-American population with roots largely in Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The middle-class included two brothers, who for forty years owned a blacksmith shop. George Washington Thomas ran this shop with his half-brother, Everett Thomas, at 103 North Linden Street, Normal. The shop was open from around the turn of the century until about 1940. The Town of Normal water plant today occupies the spot where it once stood.

Senior citizens have recalled being intrigued, as youngsters, by this large Black man in a heavy leather apron. Getting a glimpse in the shop as they passed on their way to school, they have images of him squatting down with a horse hoof over his knee. In the background were bellows and white hot coals. In the shop, the brothers shod horses, repaired buggy wheels, sharpened farm tools, and welded metal pieces.

"Wash" Thomas learned his trade from his father who had been a blacksmith in Kentucky. Thomas is described as a soft-spoken, quiet man who stood over six feet tall. He was very muscular. He shut down his business about the time World War II began. He had passed retirement age, and tractors were replacing horses. Normal was becoming too modern and busy for teams of horses to be driven along its streets.

Early in the century, the children of Normal's established African-American families were attending high school. A 1906 yearbook shows the freshmen class at Normal High School. Two of the Black students in the class are Walker Duff and Minnie Whittaker. The yearbook showed photos of the boys' basketball, baseball, and track teams and a girls' basketball team. An interesting feature which is absent from today's yearbooks was a large

section of alumni news (*Aurora* 1906).

Yearbooks give a social picture of their time period, but there are at least three drawbacks in terms of their use as historical sources. First, we don't know whether or not all the students had their pictures taken. Second, from a photograph we can't be sure what racial category an individual fits into. Finally, although the yearbook contains photos of fourth year students, it doesn't actually tell us who graduated from high school. Despite these drawbacks, they give a flavor of the social setting in a particular year.

Walker Duff, the son of Fannie and Peter Duff, was the state high school hurdles champion in 1909. He appears in photos of all the boys' sports teams in the 1906 yearbook.

The 1900 Federal Census shows Black men in Normal were still working in skilled trades. Carey Barton was a tin and coppersmith. Barton and his partner, a white man, worked as a team traveling around the Midwest. They put copper on ceilings, roofs, and domes. They worked on state capitols, churches, and schools. Locally, they put in the copper ceiling at Mount Pisgah Church and the roof on the old Holy Trinity Church.

Barton's son recalls watching the partners check their ropes every Saturday. He said they would go over their ropes almost inch by inch because their lives depended on it. Barton's wife didn't like his job because they had a family, and she didn't want to be left as its sole supporter. But in his youth the coppersmith seemed to actually enjoy the daring nature of his trade.

In 1900, there were no cars on Bloomington and Normal streets. The area's first car was probably purchased in 1904. Harry Bell is driving his horse-cart near his mother's house at 1414 South East street



Harry Bell



Bloomington. The photo was taken about 1905. Wealthy families had coachmen at that time. Sixteen Black men in Bloomington were coachmen in 1900. Others were the truck drivers of their day — teamsters — men who drove teams of horses pulling wagons which transported heavy loads. Altogether, ten Black teamsters lived in Bloomington and Normal.

Dr. Eugene Covington was a widely respected physician in Bloomington during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Covington was born in Virginia, and at an early age was sent to Catholic schools because he had achieved high test scores at the public school he first attended. He continued to excel in school. Eventually, he managed to go to Howard University where he studied medicine. While studying there, he supported himself by waiting tables summers with a friend in the Adirondacks. Later, he earned a medical degree at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where he also was quarterback of the football team.

Early in the century, he came to Bloomington and set up a practice. His son recently related that the first landlord he tried to rent from was reluctant to rent because he didn't want "craps being shot in the alley." Despite being greeted by this ridiculous prejudice, the young doctor stayed and set up a practice. He kept an office at 313 1/2 North Main Street, and his family home was at 410 East Market Street.

One person, whose family went to Dr. Covington, recalls that when he was establishing his practice, Dr. Covington used to rush his buggy in and out of the yard to give the appearance of having lots of business. Whether or not this story is true, Dr. Covington did establish a busy practice. He was on the staff at St. Joseph's Hospital and had full privileges at Mennonite Hospital. He served Black and white patients and is fondly regarded by those old enough to have memories of him. Newspapers of the period mention him frequently at church and civic affairs, and oral interviews contain remarks of great respect for this man. He is the only African-American doctor whose entire career was spent in the county.

Covington married Alice Lewis of Oswego, New York. They met through the friend that he worked summers with. After their marriage, the young couple came out to "the wilderness." Alice was never happy in Bloomington. She hated its segregation. In fact, to avoid degrading situations, she refused to ever go to movie theaters.

In the thirties, a physician, Dr. William Hatcher, had an office at 1101 West Washington Street, and Dr. Charles Thompson, a dentist, practiced at various locations. Neither man practiced in Bloomington as long as Covington. Thompson, who came in the late twenties, had an office in Bloomington until at least 1937. At that time his office was on West Washington. One person interviewed thought that Thompson worked out of Chicago for a time and had only an office here. Few white dentists would accept Black patients so there was a need for him here. Dr. Hatcher was apparently a victim of the suffering economy. The Depression years were difficult because many patients had no money. In 1992, a native of the area, Dr. Anita Beck, returned and became the first African-American woman to practice medicine in McLean County.

When Dr. Covington located in Bloomington at the turn of the century, Bloomington's downtown was in ruins, but it was a place of opportunity. During the first decade of the twentieth century, when the total population of Bloomington showed no growth, the Black population grew by 30%. In a 1906 newspaper quote, Richard Blue, barber and long-time resident, attributed the population growth to the building boom which occurred after the great fire of 1900. Others noted need for railroad laborers.

There were probably also "push" factors contributing to the population increase. One person, whose family came early in the century, told how she, her mother, father, and little brother had to leave their home in Tupelo, Mississippi during the night. Earlier that day, her mother had slapped a white boy for urinating on the lunch she and her brother were carrying to their father at his job in the mill. This slap caused the white boy's family to issue violent threats which they planned to act upon that night. So to protect the lives of her family and the property of her relatives, the mother rushed her family from Tupelo that very night. Jobs in Bloomington and violence in the South combined to increase migration to Bloomington.

Nearly all of the county's Black migration was to Bloomington. After 1900, the number of Black residents in Normal and the rural areas declined as Bloomington's Black population increased. The census of 1900 showed migration beginning to occur from the Deep South. Thirty Black adults had been born in Mississippi and twenty-four in Arkansas. Oral interviews suggest that some families followed a path



from Mississippi to Arkansas with the next generation coming to Bloomington. A brief review of the 1920 census suggests that the migration from Mississippi and Arkansas continued and increased in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Migration patterns would be a good topic for students to investigate further.

Ike Sanders ran a restaurant on South Main Street in Bloomington early in the century. His restaurant filled a need created by a growing Black population and the increasing number of Black workers. From about 1904 to 1911, Sanders operated a restaurant at 306 South Main. Ike Sanders, his first wife, Alice, behind the counter, and his sister, Lillian, on the right, are pictured in the eating establishment.



Restaurant of Ike Sanders

Archival material kept at the McLean County Historical Society reveals that Sanders needed the support of white business men in the area in order to open this business. After Alice died, Sanders closed his South Main Street business and went to Boston to be with his sister. Apparently, while he was there, he had some involvement with the Boston police. The circumstances are unclear, but an incident occurred which caused many prominent McLean County men to write letters of support for Sanders. A letter from the Chief of Police, Fred Lang, is dated December 28, 1911. Its support for Sanders is laced with paternalism. Phrases like "Colored Citizen", "first class colored restaurant", and "white friends" all suggest a society that was separate and unequal (Sanders letters, 1911).

It was not an unusual practice for Black people to get references from prominent employers. Often whites in positions of power seemed to be patrons for

certain African-American families. When Blacks needed financial help, legal aid, advice, or employment, white friends helped families whose roots were in the community cut through some of the obstacles of racial discrimination.

Across the United States, African-American businesses were increasing. Harry Bell ran his own cleaning and pressing shop in Bloomington. Bell's father was born in Maryland, and his grandmother was a seamstress who was freed by the Union Army. Harry Bell was born in Bloomington in 1884.

According to the city directories, in 1915, Bell was working as a laborer. Two years later, he was a presser. In 1919, he was a baggage man at the Chicago and Alton station, but in 1920, he had his own cleaning and pressing shop at 311 South Main, Bloomington. After 1927, he worked for Con Mueller as a presser.

The cleaning business was a common enterprise for Black entrepreneurs at this time. In 1911, Casey Brothers advertised their pressing and cleaning establishment at 610 North Main Street, Bloomington in the *Wesleyana*, the I.W.U. yearbook. The Bloomington City Directory of 1909 listed Casey's business in boldface print. The Caseys were also profiled in a pictorial souvenir book highlighting African-American businesses in central Illinois in 1912. The same year, a labor journal wrote that they had "one of the most modern plants of this kind in central Illinois" (*Bloomington Record* June 11, 1910). The shop continued to be listed at the 610 North Main address during the war years. But sometime before 1920 the business closed, and the name Casey disappeared from city directories.

About the same time, another Black-owned business produced a furniture/floor polish called Oil of Gladness. When George Hoagland, the son of a Kentucky slave, first came to Bloomington with his family, he took a job as a church janitor and began attending classes at Illinois State Normal University. Then, after selling floor mops for a time, he developed his own cleaning product, which he patented and began to successfully market.

The Hoagland business was a family-based operation. Blanche Hoagland was the company's bookkeeper. Three of her brothers also worked for the factory. Roland, Mariman, and Marion were worker, foreman, and chauffeur. Because family members provided so much labor and expertise, labor costs were



reduced. Probably, the commitment to the business was high, also.

Other Black families worked together in the economic sphere. Some continued to farm. In town, family businesses were operated by the Thomas brothers, the Calimeses, and the Caseys in the early twentieth century. Later, Fred and Hattie Rush and the Meaderds operated businesses for many years. Closer to mid-century the Shavers family and the Gaines family owned cleaning businesses. More recently, the Gastons have followed this family business tradition.

By 1911, Oil of Gladness was a very successful business. At one time, its sales grossed \$100,000 annually. Hoagland ran ads in the Bloomington High School and Illinois Wesleyan University yearbooks, as well as in the city and rural directories, for several years before World War I. At the time of these ads, there were no Black seniors in the classes at Bloomington High School, but he was aiming his product at a white market. His ads were usually large, which suggests that the business was prosperous and optimistic. Before World War I, the product was sold in many parts of the United States and in England. Hoagland's factory at 1007 West Washington employed about fifteen people.

Hoagland was a religious man who preached at the Third Christian Church on Sundays. His Christianity was put into practice the rest of the week. In addition to employing family members, he employed out-of-work parishioners in his business. He also helped church members buy their own homes by providing them interest-free loans.

Hoagland had organized the Third Christian Church in 1904. For a time, it met in a grocery store on South Western Avenue, but in 1912 the congregation built a new church a few blocks away at 301 South Western Avenue, largely through his financial support. At the time the new church was built, Hoagland's business was at its height. Hoagland left Bloomington about 1916, but the church flourished throughout the twenties and early thirties. However, by 1940 it could no longer keep a permanent pastor.

Third Christian had close ties with the white First Christian Church of Bloomington and with Eureka College. These institutions helped keep the church operating with visiting pastors until the 1960s. When it finally closed its doors, some of its congregation joined the First Christian Church. Apparently, a small

number of people in the white church were reluctant to have Black members and had to be persuaded by the Rev. John Trefzger to open their doors to their fellow Christians.

Ike and Anna Sanders ran the Workingman's Club for a short time before the end of World War I. This restaurant, boarding house, and pool hall was located at 1101 West Washington Street. It largely served the coal miners and rail yard workers who were employed in the area. Often workers stopped and ate before going home. Anna Sanders remembered that the restaurant closed when the soldiers came back from the war.



Anna Sanders

Early in this century, two influential African-American men were widely known for their seemingly opposite viewpoints on race issues. W. E. B. DuBois was a prolific scholar and writer, who was thought to be in favor of encouraging high levels of intellectual development among a "talented tenth." Booker T. Washington was the founder of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, where practical, vocational training was stressed. Although the world famous scientist, George Washington Carver, was on his staff, Washington was interested more in everyday vocational and economic training than in original



research and scholarship. Booker T. Washington visited Bloomington twice in 1915. In the spring, he addressed the Illinois Central Teachers' meeting at I.S.N.U. where he was highly praised by President Felmley. Late in the year, he drew the largest crowd at a week long chautauqua meeting (*Daily Pantagraph* Nov.15, 1915).

A Bloomington native remembered hearing him speak when she was very young. Her family arrived at the Union Baptist Church early in order to get a front row seat. The crowd grew so large that the windows were opened, and Washington spoke loudly to enable the overflow crowd outside to hear him.

At the time Washington spoke here, economic, political, and social conditions in Bloomington seemed to be developing along the lines of Washington's philosophy. The 1920 census suggests that Bloomington's residential segregation was increasing. The portion of the census recording the 1200 blocks of West Jefferson and West Monroe listed thirteen houses in a row inhabited by Black families and their boarders. Higher education was not pursued by many young African-Americans in Bloomington. Very few Blacks appeared in the junior and senior classes of the Bloomington High School yearbook.

However, many people were establishing small businesses. The 1920 Federal Census shows that James Claxton ran a restaurant, and William Shields and Mary Lewis each had boarding houses. Some entrepreneurs, like Harry Bell and Anna Sanders, appear to have stayed in their businesses a relatively short time. Others, like Fred and Hattie Rush with their secondhand goods' shop and George Nuckolls with his clothes cleaning shop, had a longer run. Oil of Gladness and Casey Brothers appear to have been successful, but short-lived.

Boone Meaderds, who named a son Booker T., would definitely seem to be a success in Washington's terms. Prior to 1920, he ran a pressing business. He kept this business for years and operated a barber shop in Bloomington until after World War II. In Normal, the Thomas blacksmith shop and Dabney barber shop each lasted many decades.

Increasing numbers of Black men worked on the railroad tracks and in the rail yards on Bloomington's west side. Many were fire knockers. When the engines pulled into the station, workers had to knock the old cinders and fire from the boiler, before a new fire was made. This was hard, dangerous work.

According to the 1920 census, other railroad jobs held by Black workers were section hand, engine coaler, coal chute tender, pan cleaner, flagman and fireman. Of course, there were also porters and baggage men at the passenger station. Only one Black man, Phillip Wright, was a machinist in the Chicago and Alton shops. Some Black rail workers were brought from Toledo, Ohio to work during the strike of 1922.

Another job open to Black men was paving streets. Many of Bloomington's muddy roads were being paved with bricks in the early years of the century. At the turn of the century, East Jefferson Street in the vicinity of the David Davis Mansion was one of the streets paved. Brick streets continued to be built in Bloomington until about 1936. A few of these beautiful streets remain in Bloomington today, but many have been covered with asphalt.

Ruth White, the widow of one bricklayer, collected stories about her husband's work. John White, an excellent worker, had established a special reputation for his speed and skill. He began laying bricks in the early 1920s, after moving here from Alabama. He had virtually no formal education, but was a highly skilled bricklayer, who could lay bricks so that they wouldn't shift at street intersections. He was so fast at his job that it took two men to keep him supplied with bricks. We can still enjoy the results of his labor today on East Monroe, East Chestnut, and East Jefferson Streets. A former employer of John White admired White's skills and said that had he possessed a formal education, with his skills he should have been a foreman or a contractor (*Daily Pantagraph* March 13, 1970). Perhaps, too, had he been white he might have been rewarded with more responsibility.

Increasingly, Black workers found their employment limited to jobs like washing clothes, cooking, and domestic or janitorial work. Many women, young and old, worked for wealthy white families. Often African-American teenagers were not encouraged to go to high school because employment chances seemed so bleak. Many students had to leave school and go to work to add to the family income. One Bloomington resident reported in an oral interview that she went to work for and lived with a wealthy family when she was twelve years old. She continued attending school for a short time, but her duties left her no opportunity to do homework or enjoy free time.

At the turn of the century, many Black women



were wage earners. The 1900 census lists twenty-seven washer women in Bloomington and thirteen in Normal. Fifteen Black women in Bloomington were domestic workers and forty-seven men and women were servants. A social structure, in which wealth and class elements were very strong, had clearly evolved in urban Bloomington. From late in the nineteenth century, until well into the years of the Great Depression and even after, large numbers of Black women washed, scrubbed, cooked and cleaned for the elite of Bloomington, and then went home to try to care for their own families with the energy they had left.

The number of Black families living in the rural parts of the county continued to decline. In 1900, there were seven African-American farmers in the rural areas of McLean County and twenty-two farm laborers. Nearly all the ancestors of these people had come to Illinois from Kentucky, Virginia, Missouri, or Tennessee. One notable farmer was Jesse Ward. Ward had been born a slave in Grand Lakes, Arkansas. He remembered his mother's low wages after the Civil War and the efforts made by the Freedmen's Bureau to offer protection to the newly free men and women. In 1867, he and his mother, along with fourteen other people, took a steamboat up the Mississippi River. Following a difficult journey, they settled in the bottomlands of Illinois. He married Mary Moore in 1877 and farmed the bottom-land with its rich top soil. However, after a terrible flood in 1882, he decided to no longer rebuild the levees. No longer would he fight the river. He and his wife moved to Bellflower.

In Bellflower, he became a tenant in charge of 160 acres. This quarter section of land was part of a huge farm held by an Indiana politician, C. W. Fairbanks, who later became Theodore Roosevelt's vice-president. In the early years, Ward laid tile, drained the swampy land, plowed the prairie sod, and dug willows. He and Mary raised a large family. Four daughters and eight sons lived to adulthood. By 1927, the Wards were farming 1,200 acres for the Fairbanks family (*Daily Pantagraph* Aug. 6, 1927 and Feb. 13, 1937).

Jesse Ward was said to have had a wonderful library. He encouraged his children to build and invent things. If they didn't know how to make something, they could learn how to make it through reading. Among other things, they made the first steam engine in their area. As adults, they did a great deal of electrical work around central Illinois. One brother



The Ward family of Bellflower

moved to Gibson City where he was a partner in a garage. Another brother refinished furniture and caned chairs in his retirement years.

The Ward family members from all accounts were well-respected citizens of Bellflower. In 1927, the *Daily Pantagraph* wrote, "They are welcome anywhere they are known. Neighbors like to exchange work with them. They expect little and give generously of their time and work." These words suggest that Jesse Ward had instilled in his children the rural values of his day. They expected to help their neighbor without necessarily getting anything in return. But is there a racial dimension to the comment "they expect little?" Race certainly is a factor in the assumption that they have to be "known" to be assured of being welcome. How many places could they comfortably go? How were they treated when they left the Bellflower, Mansfield, Osman, or Weedman area?

It is interesting to note that only three of the Ward children married. None of the older children married. In the social environment of Illinois, they had to go to a place that had Black families in order to meet potential spouses. The demands of farm work and the time needed to travel long distances by horse and buggy must have made this difficult. By the twenties, however, cars were more common. Luther, who was born in 1893, was known to occasionally drive over to Normal to visit an attractive young lady living there. Eventually, he married a woman from another African-American farm family living near Broadlands, southeast of Champaign. Jesse Jr. was two years younger, and he married a woman from Broadlands, too. Jesse and his wife farmed in Broadlands where they had three children. Robert, who was somewhat older, also married. He and his wife had two children.



They farmed in Bellflower before moving into Gibson City where he ran a garage. None of Mary and Jesse Ward's daughters married. They ran the farm households, which was very demanding work in those days, and were involved in community, church, and home bureau affairs.

Jesse Jr. and Joe led their school to the McLean County high school basketball championship in 1914. Luther's team also had been county champions. Joe went on to play at I.S.N.U. where he was elected to a college all-star team. Later, he was a well-known high school referee for many years. After leaving school, the brothers formed an independent basketball team. Several neighbors and friends became part of their team, which was reported to have lost only one game in twenty years.

The Graves and Drew families farmed north of Downs in the Bentown area. The Drews lived ten miles directly east of Bloomington. One Twin Cities resident remembered church picnics at their house with its neatly trimmed yard. The Graves family lived around the corner on Bentown Road.


### Difficult Times

Racism in the United States was very strong at the turn of the century. In 1904, the 8th Illinois National Guard planned to participate in activities at the World's Fair in St. Louis. Before their departure an Army bureaucrat wrote to Bloomington asking, "Kindly inform me whether your regiment is colored.... If that is the case you will see how necessary it will be to make some special arrangements for your accommodations. Would you be willing to bring your own tents and cooking outfit?" Needless to say, the Spanish-American War veterans from Bloomington canceled their trip (*Daily Pantagraph* June 30, 1904:10).

Unflattering images of Blacks and tasteless jokes were common in the newspapers. This ad ran in the *Daily Pantagraph* during the weeks before Christmas of 1913. Although the message intended by the ad is not clear, the picture certainly diminishes the Black figure, which is an infantile character with "funny" hair and lips. The Black caricature is placed in a subservient position to the benevolent, powerful white man.

Ironically, another way in which racist images were spread was through the constantly changing renditions of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

**You'll have money left - to buy those Christmas presents**



**YOU WILL HAVE MONEY LEFT TO BUY CHRISTMAS PRESENTS WITH IF YOU LET US MAKE YOUR CLOTHES. WE WILL MAKE YOU A GOOD SUIT OF CLOTHES OR OVERCOAT FOR**

**No More \$15 No Less**

AND WE CAN DO IT BECAUSE OUR FABRICS ARE RIGHT DIRECT FROM THE MILL TO THE WEARER. WE SAVE YOU AND GIVE YOU IN THE INCREASED VALUE OF YOUR CLOTHES THE MIDDLEMAN'S COMMISSIONS AND THE JOBBER'S PROFIT. LET US MAKE A SUIT OR OVERCOAT NOW, WE CAN FIT YOU PERFECTLY. WE STAND BEHIND EVERY GARMENT THAT LEAVES OUR PLACE.

A THOUSAND STYLES. A SINGLE PRICE.

**NO MORE \$15 NO LESS**

**TAILORS**

**BLOOMINGTON ILLINOIS**

**Illinois Hotel Building**

Newspaper advertisement 1913 (*Daily Pantagraph*)

The *Daily Pantagraph* mentioned a couple of these early changes when it announced the arrival of a new version of the play. In a Rial and Draper production there was to be a "trick donkey" and "trained bloodhounds" (Dec.25, 1880:4). The play continued to change and to be played in Bloomington. It was still being performed in Bloomington in the 1920s (Morgan diary, 1895-1925). Scholar Mary Henderson says this of the Uncle Tom character: "Somewhere in tents set among the cornfields he lost his dignity... and became the servile, obedient, sycophantic black man who gave the term 'Uncle Tom' its terrible taint" (Ammons 1994:455). The novel that had been the



strong moral tract of the pre-Civil War era was turned into the racist play of the early twentieth century.

Minstrel shows in "black face" were another common racist form of entertainment for many decades. As late as 1929, the women of the Bloomington Township Home Bureau presented "The Lady Minstrels from Dixie" in Bloomington and surrounding communities. A newspaper photo shows eight of these women in black face (*Daily Pantagraph* March 23, 1929:11).

Other images like this can be found in mainstream publications of the time. Cartoons, yearbooks, and newspapers carried these images without apology. Images like this hurt. At a slightly later period, a person being interviewed about her school experience remembered first grade story hour. She was the only African-American girl in the class. When the teacher read "Little Black Sambo," the other children's eyes were on her. She could barely endure it. Years later in her retirement years, she remembered the dread of story hour.

Another resident remembered the playground teasing that followed the singing of "Shortnin' Bread" or "Swanee River" in class. Songs in dialect and stories that used offensive language were made doubly painful by the teachers' lack of sensitivity to their effect.

The issue of television, video, and movie images of Black people is often discussed today. Many observers think that because African-Americans are often portrayed in stereotyped roles that the breadth of the Black community is rarely seen by either Black or white television viewers. Your class might discuss this subject.

In an unwelcoming social climate, it wasn't easy for a Black person to reach his or her goals. Gleana Caldwell's words in her 1918 senior yearbook were, "I was never less alone than when by myself." Caldwell was the only Black student to appear in the senior section of the Bloomington High yearbook in 1918. The next Black senior photo appeared in 1921. Blanche Hoagland had graduated from Bloomington High School, probably before 1910. But African-American faces are a rarity in BHS photos in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

By the end of the twenties, an increasing number of African-American students attended Bloomington High School, and some were involved in school organizations. But they were all excluded from the swimming unit in physical education class, a not too subtle reminder that many, if not most, of their white administrators, teachers, and classmates thought they

were different and inferior. This exclusion seems to have been a significant formative experience for many who attended Bloomington High School.

Casey Brothers and Oil of Gladness both sold their businesses before 1920. It is unclear why these businesses didn't last. They both appeared to be very successful for a time. Were their closings based on individual decisions or were they related to other issues like the effects of the war, dependence on a white market, loss of influential support, or opportunities in bigger cities? Hoagland moved to Nashville, Tennessee, but it isn't clear whether or not his family became involved in business there.

War broke out in Europe in 1914, and African-American soldiers were called again to serve in segregated troops. "The Colored Man is No Slacker" was a recruiting poster of the time. Thirty-seven men from Bloomington-Normal fought with the 370th US Infantry in Europe. The 370th had replaced the old 8th Infantry.

During the World War I years, *The Advertiser* carried news to and about the Black community. This four page paper carried news about jobs, illnesses, social events, church affairs, and visits that might be more interesting to us today than it was to its original readers. It gives us a view of everyday events. The paper also has a number of advertisements. These give us collaborative information about Black businesses.

In one issue, two hair dressers offer "poro" hair treatment. Poro was a West Indian word which captured some elements of unity and pride. "Poro" hair products were manufactured by Annie Turnbo Malone, a contemporary and rival of Madam C. J. Walker. Malone was from Metropolis, Illinois and attended high school in Peoria. In the early 1900s, she produced her hair products in St. Louis. She advertised her products in the Black newspapers of large Northern cities and had tens of thousands of agents across the United States and the West Indies. Some of her agents lived in Bloomington.

Seven hundred fifty copies of one issue of *The Advertiser* were printed. One has been donated to the McLean County Historical Society. It carries a great deal of historical value. If you know of other issues, save them or contact the McLean County Historical Society.

Revelation Rhoades published a newspaper during the Depression. In the 1960s, the *Central Sentinel* was published in central Illinois. Today the *Voice* provides



the Black community with church and community news. It prints a wide range of opinion on topics which are of special interest to African-Americans.

World War I continued in Europe, and McLean County men faced combat. Alonzo Walton of Normal received a citation for bravery for carrying food to his company during a German barrage. Marco Shavers, Howard Brent, Donald Hunter, and Harry L. Pierson also received distinguished service awards for their actions in Europe.

African-American soldiers experienced a degree of racial freedom in Europe that they didn't have at home. Letters from Fred Johnson of the 370th United States Infantry to Frank Ensenberger at home tell of sleeping with goats, pigs, chickens, cows, and dead enemy soldiers. Once his horse was shot from under him. Another time his unit got in a rumble with a group from Alabama who had beat up "eight or nine colored lads." But he also spoke of great pride in the achievements of his regiment. He was moved by a general who came to their officer and praised the men, saying he'd never had a group who "used such hard force and stuck together more." Johnson was proud and felt that at last "we are something... and are going to get what is really due us" (*Daily Pantagraph* July and Sept., 1918).

Gus Williams was killed in action in Europe toward the end of September, 1918 (Pierson 107). John Redd was mortally wounded on September 30, 1918 (Pierson 111). He died at Brest, France. A memorial service was held at Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church for Gus Williams. The photo is of his funeral procession.

Returning soldiers felt that after fighting for



Funeral procession for Gus Williams

"democracy" abroad, they should be entitled to it at home. But the social restrictions had not weakened. One reminder that the racial barriers were still up was the fact that Black veterans could not join the veterans' organizations at home.

In light of this, Bloomington's Redd-Williams American Legion Post for African-American veterans was organized in honor of Gus Williams and John Redd. On February 28, 1919 returned African-American soldiers were given a large reception at the Coliseum in Bloomington. Mayor E. E. Jones, Dr. Covington, and the Honorable Adelbert Roberts, a state representative from Chicago, were special guests. Roberts was quoted at length in the *Daily Pantagraph*:

*I was glad when I got to Bloomington to see the best white people join the best black people of the city in a welcome for these 'Black Devils.' A government that is great and grand enough to carry democracy over the seas to the Belgian and the Serb, who does not speak the English language, is great enough to spread it to the colored race at home. Give these boys a chance. They kept Old Glory afloat in the breeze" (Daily Pantagraph Feb. 28, 1919).*

But the racial climate didn't change nationwide. Nor did it change in McLean County. The situation of Julia Duff was a typical one. Miss Duff earned a teaching certificate at Illinois State Normal University, but had to go to Tulsa, Oklahoma to find a teaching position in a high school. Not only did this teacher face long absences from her family, our community lost the opportunity to hire a talented teacher because of the existing practice of racial discrimination. In 1992, former University of Chicago History department chair, John Hope Franklin, reminisced about Julia Duff at a meeting at the McLean County Historical Society. As a young man he had known of her in Tulsa, Oklahoma where she was a highly respected teacher. Later, in her retirement years, whenever he came to lecture in this area, he visited her in her home in Normal.

Oliver Whittaker, who early in the century earned a diploma in business administration from Wilberforce University, pressed pants for the Model Paris company until the company changed hands during the



Depression. WPA work, odd jobs, and janitorial work followed until his retirement.

A younger neighbor, basketball star Wilbur Barton, got a university degree in Industrial Arts. He first went to teach in a Black school in southern Indiana and then to Indianapolis. To get a teaching job, a Black teacher had to go South or to an urban area that had a large Black population. Many graduates from this area went to cities like Kansas City, Indianapolis, and Chicago. The first Black public school teachers hired in the county were hired in the early 1960s.

Movie theaters in Bloomington were segregated. Black movie-goers were told to sit in the balcony or a partitioned section of it. Balcony seats were not necessarily the worst seats. In some cultures, balcony seats are desired, but, of course, that isn't the point. The act of segregation itself suggested that the group making and enforcing the rules considered itself superior to the group it victimized. The purpose of the segregation was to constantly remind Black movie-goers of their "place."

Not everyone accepted their "place." The Normal theater was integrated earlier than the Bloomington theaters. Some time after World War II, Lyle Dabney, son of the Normal barber, physically resisted going to the balcony when a young usher told him to do so. The next day the usher went to Mr. Dabney to complain about Lyle, but some college students at Illinois State backed Lyle, and the theater was integrated. Whether or not it stayed integrated, I'm not sure, but other sources have claimed that it did. The fact is that the number of young Black people in Normal was so small by the forties and fifties, there wouldn't have been many opportunities to test the policy.

Bloomington theaters clearly remained segregated. A railing kept Black viewers separate from white viewers in the balcony in one theater. This practice continued until the early fifties.

Frank Dabney ran a barber shop in downtown Normal from about 1894 until 1956. Dabney's obituary reports that after learning the barbering trade in Springfield he began a career that lasted for sixty-three years. He married Lucy Barton in Normal in 1896. He worked in various Normal locations, but in 1915 he opened a shop at 112 East Beaufort which he kept until 1956.

The Dabneys had ten children, most of whom moved to other areas as young people. One daughter, Juanita, stayed in Normal and gave private music lessons. Several children moved to Chicago, which

seems from oral interviews to have been a common pattern until at least mid-century. For high school and college graduates the job opportunities were better in larger cities. Janitorial and domestic service were the jobs available to graduates who stayed here. Then too, there were more social opportunities in the big cities, and in the days when "Chicago was a kinder place," that had a strong appeal.

At his barber shop, Dabney cut only white people's hair. This was a policy he followed in order to maintain his business in the face of the twentieth century racism of his community. Shortly after he closed, though, students at Illinois State University began protesting segregated barber shops.

Down the street from the Dabney shop, Jerome and Napoleon Calimese had a shop in which they, too, cut only white people's hair. In 1920, their shop was at 101 East Beaufort. Later, they crossed the street to 102 East Beaufort.

At Miller Park, Black swimmers could only go into a separate, undesirable part of the lake. The beach was segregated with separate entrances and separate and very much "unequal" bathing houses. However, people sometimes actively resisted such treatment. One person remembered that when she went swimming in the "white" section of the lake her mother was threatened with the "big, Irish cop." Unintimidated, she proclaimed that she paid taxes and her daughter would swim in the public lake. She won that round. Years later, another mother called the mayor's office, and her child swam at the public beach that day.

Obviously, this didn't happen frequently, and the general policy of separation of the races and inferior facilities for Blacks was followed for many years. However, it seems that in Bloomington those individual acts of defiance pecked away at the system; weakened it. The daughter who swam in the forbidden water later in life walked through many other doors which were supposedly closed to people of her race.

Bill Flick of the *Pantagraph* reprinted a letter in his column, which indicated that segregated swimming facilities at Miller Park were still accepted by members of both races at mid-century. The letter, a request from Mr. Henderson, the Secretary of the NAACP, for better facilities at the Negro section of the beach, and the health department's response revealed the social arrangement in Bloomington in 1950. Racial segregation in public facilities was an accepted fact of



life. Students might profit from analyzing the letter sent to Mr. N. J. Henderson, Secretary of the NAACP by a Health Department official in 1950.

*Dear Mr. Henderson:*

*As per your request, an inspection of the bathing facilities for Negroes at Miller Park Lake (has been) made... (and) it was found that facilities are inadequate in both shower and toilet facilities.*

*A copy of this letter is being sent to the Mayor of the City of Bloomington.*

*Our recommendation, in the interest of health and sanitation, is that adequate toilet and shower facilities (be) properly connected to the city sewer (and) provided for both Negro men and women.*

*Yours very truly,*

*McLean County Health Department*

At this time, the social structures of the Union of South Africa and those of Bloomington looked very much alike. But change occurred. It is worth considering that change can be either positive or negative. Things don't always get better; they can get worse. That's exactly what happened in South Africa during the following forty years of apartheid. In Bloomington there was a positive change as the custom of separation weakened in the fifties, and in the sixties law began to dismantle the policies of segregation. By 1990, social and governmental policies of South Africa and those of the United States were very different from one another.

In addition to heavy social restrictions, employment opportunities were limited. Aside from people employed in the Black-owned businesses, there was only one Black secretary in Bloomington in the twenties and thirties. Belle Claxton, the daughter of a very early Bloomington resident, was a secretary for a white lawyer. As a student, Lucinda Miller admired Mrs. Claxton and may have been influenced by her example. After graduation from high school, Miss Miller attended I.S.N.U. One day she was called upon to do temporary work at a Bloomington office. An I.S.N.U. business professor sent Lucinda Miller to Eureka-Williams to fill a short term need. She was qualified for the job. The university and the office seemed in agreement on that point. But she was denied the job because of the company's policy of

discrimination towards African-Americans. This incident which happened before 1930 is best told in Lucinda Miller Brent Posey's own words:

*They needed somebody and I was her best typing student so she sent me. Well when I went in, I had to visit. There was a whole row of desks, the kids working here were young people that finished high school with me. Boys and girls.... Well I said hello to everybody as I went in. This woman met me and took me way back down the hall and gave me a form to fill out, which I filled out.... She told me to come to work the next morning at eight o'clock (you'd be excused at I.S.N.U. from your studies you see for—whatever—two or three days this was ). Oh yes, she was very happy with my record and she said to come to work tomorrow morning at eight o'clock. I often wondered what would have happened if I had walked out then instead of stopping and visiting all the way back down this row.... I was almost to the door and somebody said, "Miss Miller." And I turned around and it was this woman... She said, "What race are you?" "You have put Negro on the application." And I said, "That's right." "Well you are not a pure Negro."*



Lucinda Miller (Pantagraph Files)



*I said, "I know that."*

*"I can't hire you if you're a Negro. Will you put down that you are Indian, Mexican? Anything except Negro and I can hire you...."*

*I said, "Well I'm a Negro" and with that I got up and walked out—completely crushed...*

Despite this devastating early experience, Lucinda Miller did go on to have a very successful career and hold many positions of significant responsibility in Bloomington-Normal. Lucinda Miller became a real pioneer in many areas of life locally and regionally. After marrying a member of the church choir, Howard Brent, she worked as a stenographer at Illinois Soldiers and Sailors Children's School for nine years. Later, she took additional courses in St. Louis and became the medical record librarian at Brokaw Hospital. For many years, she was in charge of medical records at Brokaw Hospital. As a hospital administrator, she became involved in professional organizations at the state level.

In addition to this busy professional life, she stayed involved in civic and church activities. Among other positions, she was a board member of the Red Cross, the Booker T. Washington Home, the League of Women Voters, and the Bloomington Public Library. Her name, as well as her husband's, often appear on musical programs that have been saved and archived.

The Ku Klux Klan was active in McLean County in the twenties or early thirties. The Klan preached hatred toward Blacks, Jews, and Catholics. A poster advertising a meeting to be held in Lexington invites the "Protestant Public" to bring its robes (Klan poster). The Ku Klux Klan seems to be absent from the written histories of Bloomington. I haven't been able to find newspaper accounts of Klan activity.

Oral history dredges up some memories of it, though. One person said that when she was young, in the late twenties, the Klan marched down Oakland Avenue. At the corner of Main and Oakland her father pulled the mask off the son of a friend of his and asked him, "What are you doing here?" Another woman born in 1923 remembered that when she was very young, a large cross was burned on the railroad tracks. It was intended to frighten the large number of Black men who worked for the railroads. A brother and sister recalled hearing of meetings east of the camel back

bridge in Normal.

A white Catholic woman driving out on the edge of town with her father in perhaps the same area, recalled being stopped by men who won't let him through. He, too, was unintimidated by those thugs who threatened members of his religious group.

In late October, 1929, the stock market crashed. The following decade was very hard for most people, but the Great Depression was particularly devastating for African-Americans.

Donald Clark, who was born in Columbia, Missouri in 1895, had a poverty-stricken childhood. He moved to Bloomington before being drafted into the army in 1918 at the end of World War I. Although life had never been easy for him, he remembered the Depression as a particularly difficult time. He remembered that he and others appreciated the help they received from the Salvation Army and Home Sweet Home Mission. Other Bloomington residents remember the unemployed people who moved along the railroad lines. Men with no jobs and no food would sometimes come to their homes and ask for food. People who were children at the time recall that their families shared their food.

Another resident of Bloomington summed up the Depression by saying, "Black people lost everything. They lost their homes and everything they had." Because her family had saved some money, they weren't eligible for the food, clothing, or fuel offered by the relief program. "Any progress that Blacks have made has been since the Depression," she said.

The Depression was very hard for nearly everyone. Some families who had owned their own homes lost them. People, who had always held jobs, couldn't find work. Black people had always taken low paying jobs, but during the Depression whites, who at an earlier time wouldn't have taken such work, were now taking service jobs. It's been reported that there was pressure on people who hired servants and maids to let their Black servants go and replace them with white workers. White families like the Beichs and Ewings were appreciated for not firing their Black help.

Statistics support the picture drawn by oral interviews that the Depression was hard on African-Americans in McLean County. While the white population of Bloomington grew by two thousand people during the decade of the thirties, the Black population declined by nearly forty people.





Wayman A.M.E. Church ca 1910



Mount Pisgah Baptist Church members 1922



## Struggling On

Churches remained an integral part of the Black community. In the 1880s, the Methodist church had been the first home of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, which produced publications and materials for Sunday School teachers. On the basis of archaeological research, it has been proposed that in the 1890s the church played a health role during a period of epidemics (Wagers). In 1895, Wayman hosted the Illinois Conference of the A.M.E. churches. In 1909-10, the church was remodeled and enlarged to appear as it does in the photo on the previous page. In a later remodeling, some of the features seen here were removed or covered. The present building has lost some of the pleasing elements of the 1910 structure.

Mount Pisgah Baptist Church, whose deacons, trustees, and auxiliaries are shown in the 1922 photo on the previous page, continued to be an important church in the community.

Those pictured are Carson Terell, Thomas Scroggins, John Williams, and J. C. Walker in the front row. Carolina C. Williams, Carrie M. Wakefield, Anna Scroggins, Rev. P. W. Fields and Mrs. Alberta Fields, Mrs. Gertrude Barnett, and Mrs. J. W. Walker are in the middle row. Those in the back row are Napoleon Calimese, William Ervin, W. S. Caldwell, B. V. Meaderds, N. B. Gaines, J. W. Walker, J. B. Scott, and Horace Johnson.

The Baptist congregation moved a few blocks south to a new brick building at Lee Street and Oakland Avenue in 1916. The photo on the bottom of the previous page was taken at a celebration to honor Rev. and Mrs. Fields for their four years of service. The program included instrumental music by Lucinda Miller, a paper by N. B. Gaines, and an address by Dr. Covington.

During the Depression, Caribel Washington taught a pre-school class under a Work Projects Administration grant. Caribel Washington graduated from high school during the Depression. At that time the government established a work program called the WPA [Work Projects Administration], to combat unemployment and at the same time address societal needs. Mrs. Washington was first hired by the WPA to teach in a music project. She also worked in a recreation program which was the forerunner of the present-day Parks and Recreation. She taught in this program for about four years. Usually twelve to fifteen children

were in the program.

Louise and Napoleon Calimese were matron and superintendent of the Colored Children's Home, which became known as the Booker T. Washington Home in 1942. The Calimeses ran the home from 1927 until the early fifties. The home cared for and raised children who were orphans or whose own parents or relatives could not support them.

Before the Depression hit, Mrs. Ledonia Barker had begun the home. Apparently without much funding or support, she began to care for orphaned and unwanted Black children. In 1918, she and her husband rented a small house and took in six orphaned children. The number of children grew, and in 1920 the Barkers were granted a charter for the home by the state. The census of 1920 provides statistics that prove surprising and troubling. Fifteen of the eighteen inmates in the home at the time were listed as mulatto. The term mulatto had been used to identify many African-Americans in the nineteenth century, but by 1920 it was not frequently used in the census. If nearly all of the orphaned or abandoned children who came to Mrs. Barker had one Black and one white parent, it would seem that some parents were being very irresponsible or some families were shamefully denying the existence of their own nieces, nephews, or grandchildren in the face of social pressure. Luckily for these children, Mrs. Barker took the place of those who could not or did not meet their responsibilities.

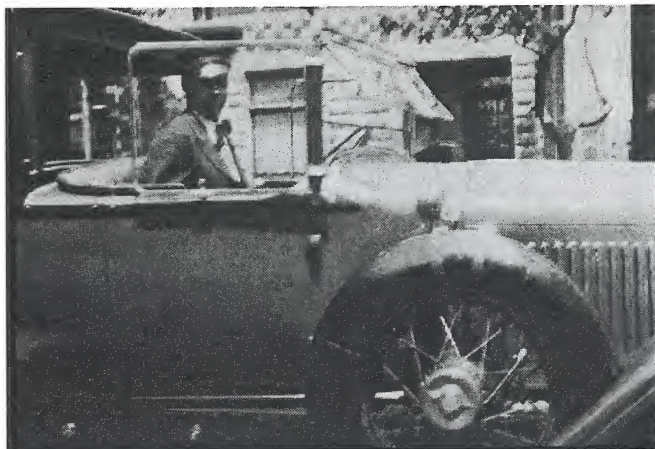
Records from the home show that during the twenties and thirties, children came from various cities around Illinois. They were often placed in the home by the Court. Fathers, mothers, and other relatives also placed the children in the home (Booker T. Washington Home files).

Mrs. Barker and the Calimeses are spoken of with great respect by people giving oral interviews. One woman remembers that as a girl she went to the home after school, and Mrs. Barker just looked after her like she did the other children. Under the Calimese's guidance, children learned respect and responsibility. The children had gardens and raised their own food in the summers. A much-respected man of the community recalled that nearly all the children under the care of the Calimeses turned out to be productive adults. One of those productive adults, Betty Ebo, will be heard from later.

John Duff was a chauffeur for the Stevenson family. As cars replaced horses in the early part of this



century, Black men began to work as chauffeurs. John Duff drove for the mother of Adali Stevenson, the two-time Democratic Party presidential candidate. This picture was taken in the early thirties. Apparently,



John Duff (Reginald Whittaker Collection)

Duff had some free time after delivering the Stevensons to their destination, and he took the opportunity to show off the car to his relatives who lived on the near south side of Chicago. Other Normal residents worked for the Stevensons. Alverta Duff worked for the Stevenson family for many years.

Several women were engaged in business in the twenties and thirties. Emma Smith ran a successful massage and bathing parlor on the second floor of Roland's Department Store which was frequented by wealthy white women. Emma Smith was befriended by Mrs. Roland. Smith served a regular set of east side clients. She, herself, dressed quite fashionably. At her death, some of her relatives were surprised to find that she had willed her money to Mrs. Roland.

Maggie Smith had a catering service. She did the initial food preparation in her home, and then finished the meals in the home of the family for whom she was working. Usually these were affairs in the affluent neighborhoods of Bloomington. Another woman who had her own business was Jennie Johnson. She was a beautician who is mentioned in many of the oral interviews. Her clients were African-American, and her business was often advertised on programs and fliers.

Fannie Kirksey [Perryman] left Bloomington after high school graduation in 1933 looking for a more fulfilling life in Chicago. Several years after she moved to Chicago, Fannie Kirksey Perryman took a job working for Milton Webster, an official with A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping

Car Porters. From 1939 to 1946 she was a secretary for Webster, who liked the work of the small town woman. He thought secretaries educated in small towns usually had strong spelling and secretarial skills.

The sleeping car porters' organization of Randolph and Webster was a forerunner of later civil rights organizations. During the thirties and forties, the porters' union established an organizational network that was used when the contemporary civil rights movement began. Perryman worked with and knew many of the significant leaders of both the labor movement and the civil rights movement. She even worked for a time with Jesse Jackson and Dr. Martin Luther King when Dr. King rented an apartment on the west side of Chicago during his open housing marches there in 1966-67.

Carl Samuels was a Bloomington man who worked as a coach porter on the Chicago Alton line. Samuels was born in Bloomington. He left grade school in order to help support his mother. He held a number of jobs during his working career, but the one he held longest was coach porter. His run from Chicago to St. Louis kept him traveling a lot. When he started the job, he was paid \$4.00 for the run. Of course, low wages was one of the conditions that the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters had been organized to change. As did other porters, Samuels earned most of his money in tips.

Many Normal men were involved in positions on the railroads. Newton and A. J. Henderson worked on mail cars on the Chicago to Kansas City run. Thomas Green was a dining car waiter on the Pennsylvania Railway. George Patterson was a porter. Several of the Barton brothers were porters, also. This was a service job. Sleeping car porters were expected to help passengers to their quarters, make beds, tidy up, and generally be available to serve the passengers with a smile. Although Black porters were not paid as well as whites in other jobs on the train, with tips the job provided a fair income. It was a job that carried prestige in the Black community.

Well-known promoter and sign-painter Revelation Rhoades, frequently organized entertainment events. Victoria Spivey was one of the early twenties vaudeville singers who became famous as a blues singer. She performed at the Coliseum in Bloomington, which was located at Roosevelt Avenue and Front Street.

Revy Rhoades is remembered as an excellent artist



and cartoonist. He was a sign painter whose office was at 313<sup>rd</sup> North Main Street, Bloomington. He created beautiful store windows. He founded a social club on South Main. For a time, he also published a small newspaper. One person, who knew his work well, said that with his good business skills had he been white there was no telling what he could have done.

Rhoades had a brother who moved to Chicago and became a well-known singer and political figure. Simon Rhoades, who was famous for his "Irish" ballads, once performed at a Republican Party national convention. He also wrote for the *Chicago Defender*.

During the years of Prohibition, the second floor of the present-day Lucca's Grill at the corner of Market and East Streets was the home of a night club operated by Bill Tinsley and William "Doll" Watson. The manufacture, distribution, and sale of alcohol was prohibited from 1918 to 1933 by an amendment to the United States Constitution. Prior to that time, Bloomington had had municipal laws prohibiting the use of alcohol. During these years the Mayfield Social Club, a Black "speakeasy," operated at the 116<sup>th</sup> East Street address.

Of course, there were also white "speakeasies" at this period. But researching the locations of any of these establishments isn't easy. They weren't advertised in city directories, nor were they mentioned in the public record. The city directories for those years don't mention saloons, taverns or bars.

Dances were very popular events in the twenties, thirties, and forties. Illinois State Normal University had big dances for Black students and their guests. In those days there was a spring prom for white students and another one for Black students. Of course, college parties in those days needed chaperones. A very popular one was basketball coach Joe Cogdal. He and his wife were said to be excellent ballroom dancers.

Parties were also held at places like Mackinaw Falls, the Coliseum, the American Legion Hall in the McBarnes building, or O'Neil Park. These spaces were rented for special occasions. There was no place to go every week and dance. When Blacks went to white dances, they were turned away.

Jimmy Raschel's Danville-based band played for segregated white audiences here, providing them entertainment and his band a livelihood. Bloomington musician Orlando Dyer played with the band in the early thirties. The band eventually worked out of Columbus, Ohio, playing in white clubs in Ohio,

Michigan, Indiana, and Virginia. Lottie Dyer remembers the wonderful time she had traveling with her husband and staying in resorts and towns that were less segregated than Bloomington. During those days with the band, she met stars like Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, and Duke Ellington. She thought Duke Ellington was a wonderful gentleman.

In Bloomington, Orlando Dyer played at white clubs like the Night Hawk on West Seminary Street and Melody Mill at Morris Avenue and Veterans Parkway. The racial segregation of the day prevented Blacks from seeing the band perform at white clubs. Black audiences waited to see them in the early hours of the morning in places like the Third Ward Club where they might play purely for enjoyment after working for pay in a white club earlier in the evening.

The Young Men's Fellowship Club had a popular softball team during the thirties. This team was one of four local softball teams. Apparently, softball was not standardized in those days. Over time the ball used was reduced in size from 14" to the 12" ball used today. The bases were moved from 45 feet to 60 feet apart.

Two of the stars on the Young Men's Fellowship Club were Albert and Harry Wood. One of their rivals was another Black team, Jackson's Furniture of Normal. Jackson's included names like Barton, Bynum, Duff, and Covington. These teams played white teams in the area. And like the barnstorming professional and semi-professional black baseball and basketball teams of that segregated time they remember facing very abusive language in some of the small towns of central Illinois.

The 1934 Young Men's Fellowship Club team included Dick Tate. Tate was Bloomington High School's first Black athlete. He went on to be a star football and baseball player at I.S.N.U. and team captain in 1928. Later, he played in the Negro baseball league. Many people thought that he was good enough to have played major league baseball, but he was denied the opportunity of trying because of the racial barrier in effect in professional baseball until Jackie Robinson was signed by the Dodgers after World War II.

Tate also was a member of the Cooksville semi-pro team one summer. Their coach, Wilbur Fitzgerald, called the 1929 team his best team ever. However, only one of the players was from Cooksville. Fitzgerald is quoted as saying, "These boys weren't recruited. They just wanted to play. They would come to me because I always had a good ball club" (Quaid



253). The *Daily Pantagraph* reported in August that "Dick Tate... will be seen in action during the tourney while a number of teams are loading up for close competition" (Aug. 21, 1929). Cooksville won its own tournament, and Tate was selected for the all-tournament team. Each weekend that fall there was a four-day tournament somewhere in the area. On September 22, 1929, Tate and other Cooksville players played for Ellsworth in the Anchor Tourney, and the next weekend Tate and Nichols played with the Colored Giants, who came in fourth in the Anchor Tournament. In the summer of 1929, the desire to win seemed to override team loyalty and, to a degree, color prejudice.

Wilbur Barton was a basketball star at Illinois State Normal University. He attended college during the Depression. Photos from the *Index* suggest that there



Wilbur Barton, I.S.N.U. captain, 1935

were more Black students attending I.S.N.U. in the thirties than there had been earlier. In particular, there was an increase in the number of local African-American students in the yearbook photos.

Part of the reason for the growing number of local students may have been the fact that the number of Black students graduating from Bloomington High School increased during the twenties. We know that today when unemployment increases, college and graduate school applications tend to increase also. Was a similar phenomena at work in those days even though most Black families were in very difficult financial situations? College costs were low then. Perhaps, staying out of school to try to find a non-existent job offered no financial advantage to those who could go to school and board at home.

Wilbur Barton played sports at University High School in Normal and continued his career at Illinois State Normal University. Even though he attended college during the early thirties, his memories are positive ones. As an athlete he had employment under WPA programs (there were no athletic scholarships), and because his family was from Normal, he could live and board at home. This reduced his expenses and shielded him from the difficulty most Black students faced finding a room. Because Black students could not live in the dormitories, many Black students boarded with families in Bloomington. They would have to make the long walk home from the library, classes, or practice in the dark.

One of Barton's first experiences with segregation came when the University High School basketball team traveled to Springfield to play in a sectional tournament. The players decided to go see a movie. When they lined up for tickets, Barton was about halfway back in the group of team members. The first players got their tickets and walked in. When Barton offered his money for a ticket, he was refused. He was bewildered by this, and the ticket-taker said, "We don't cater to colored." Since Barton knew the word "cater" in connection with food, it took a moment to figure out that he was being denied entry. When the players behind him realized what was happening, they left and went back to the hotel.

There are at least two things about this experience that are worth noting. First, Barton had never tried to go to a movie theater before. Normal didn't have one yet. Secondly, when his white friends experienced with Wilbur Barton the humiliation of this experience,



they understood the injustice and supported him. Generally, whites don't experience life as Blacks experience it, and as a result, often don't understand the feelings and frustrations of Black people.

Segregation in housing became a problem for Barton when he traveled to games away from home. While his white teammates stayed together in a hotel, he had to find a place to stay with a Black family in town. Although he understood the racist nature of this practice, once on a trip to Chicago this discrimination worked to his advantage. His team stayed at an old established hotel. The hotel's management seeking to avoid problems with older patrons isolated him away from the team in a newly constructed portion of their hotel. Discrimination, he recalls with humor, gave him a much larger, more comfortable room than his teammates had.

Upon graduation, though, this popular basketball captain faced the reality that other Bloomington-Normal African-American graduates had faced. In order to get a teaching job, he had to leave his home area. He went to teach in segregated schools in Indiana.

Women's sports did not receive much news coverage at this time, but it is thought that Tydie Ann Pickett, an I.S.N.U. student from Chicago, was a member of the track team that went to the Berlin Olympics.

Women's clubs like the Progressive Club provided a social outlet for many Black women. African-American women's clubs first came into existence nationally as a result of Ida B. Wells' anti-lynching campaigns in the late nineteenth century. Some of the clubs which have existed in Bloomington and Normal include the Three C's, Domestic Arts, Civic Women's, and the Victory clubs. They served social and sometimes service, civic, or educational functions. Some were democratic in their membership, and others were said to be a bit class or status conscious.

Churches continued to provide for social and spiritual needs. The Methodist churches of Bloomington and Pontiac sometimes held joint services in Pontiac. A member of the Wayman A.M.E. Church remembers that the young people of the church performed a play called *The Wild Oats Boys*. It turned out well so they took it on the road and performed for the A.M.E. church in Pontiac.

The churches provided outlets for musical expression. They, as well as the clubs and organizations, provided a buffer against the widespread discrimination Blacks faced in daily life. In addition to meeting spiritual

needs, the churches served important social functions. People often went to their own church on Sunday morning and to another one in the evening. Union Baptist was remembered for its wonderful Halloween festivities. High teas and church dinners were important events. Some churches were noted for their choirs. Wayman at one time had a Lyceum that was attended by the college students because they were shut out of the social life at the universities. Debates, plays, sing-a-longs, and speeches were all activities that could take place at church.

Although schools had been integrated in the early years of Reconstruction and housing wasn't totally segregated, many other aspects of life were. Hotels, restaurants, movies, golf courses, swimming pools, barber shops and dance halls were segregated. It was not until the nineteen fifties that these institutions began to integrate. So churches, lodges, and clubs provided needed social outlets.

Funerals were an occasion of family and community bonding as well as of grief. In the recent past, African-American families brought the body of the deceased home for a wake in the living room or parlor. The wake was held in the home. While in mourning, women wore black veils and men black arm bands. Families, or perhaps a church member, would sit up through the night in the room with the casket. The funeral was held at church, and after the burial, relatives and friends would return to the home for dinner, which was served by a church organization.

A program from The Young Men's Fellowship Club's presentation of *A Dream* collaborates information from oral interviews and other sources of information. The ads in a printed program of this type can tell us what individuals and businesses were active at a particular time. This production was probably presented in Bloomington in the mid-thirties. Some of the ads in the program are particularly helpful in attaching a date to the performance. Existing copies of city directories list Oliver Holmes, the undertaker, in business between 1934 and 1937. Thomas Turner, the barber, is no longer listed in 1937. Cornelia Chocklate and Charles Thompson are listed for slightly longer periods in the thirties. The Rush ad wasn't helpful in establishing an approximate date for the performance, because Fred and Hattie Rush were in the restaurant and second hand goods businesses for many years. However, it shows they supported community events during the Depression.





**Hursey family funeral gathering**

The Melody Gospel Singers under the direction of Hazel and Frank Harber performed in McLean County from 1934 until about 1970. This group rehearsed in the Social Center, which was located on what is now the lawn west of City Hall in Bloomington. They performed on radio, broadcasting from the studio above the Castle Theater. They traveled widely, even singing in many small towns in the area.

In recent years, Martin Luther King's birthday has been the occasion of Gospelfest. This affair, inspired by Mrs. Corrine Simms and held at Presser Hall on the Illinois Wesleyan campus, draws gospel groups from around the state for a day of music, speeches, performance, and celebration. Culturefest, another contemporary annual event, includes gospel music in its wide range of activities. Otis Brewer has been active in developing this event since its inception and has helped broaden its reach to a wide section of the community.

During the second quarter of the twentieth century, Willis Stearles could be seen daily at Miller Park Zoo, caring for the animals. Stearles began working as an animal feeder at the zoo in about 1925. Over the years, he developed a strong bond with the animals and with the children who visited them. It was said that he always wore the same type of clothing so that the animals could easily recognize him.

And know him they did! His was a patronage job, and after a losing election, he was asked to resign his job. However, the transition to a new staff wasn't very smooth because the animals went on strike. They refused to eat. This protest continued until their long-time caretaker was asked to come back. Willis Stearles resumed his job at the zoo as a result of a hunger strike. Mr. Stearles continued working there until the fifties. At the time of his retirement, he was the zoo superintendent.





Willis Stearles at Miller Park ca 1940 (Pantagraph Files)

Willis Stearles was from a family active in military, political, and civic affairs. He married Kathryn Williams who was from an old Bloomington-Normal family. They lived in her family home at 1502 North Fell Avenue in Bloomington. The two-story frame house, which had probably been built in the 1880s, was very recently torn down.

Boone Meaderds was one of the few Blacks who managed to stay in business throughout the Depression. Before running a barber shop, Meaderds was in the pressing and cleaning business. But through most of the thirties until 1948 or 1949, he had a barber shop at 206° South Center in Bloomington.

An earlier cleaning and pressing business was run by George Nuckolls. A former employee remembers when his shop was on Center Street under a hotel that used to stand north of Rolands. She recalls a good amount of business coming to the shop. At one time in the twenties, the directory listed his shop at 105 East Jefferson Street. Later, the business was moved to 1008 West Washington Street.

A good student project would be to further study African-American businesses in Bloomington-Normal. City directories can give dates and locations, and it is not too late to interview people about businesses run

by Casey Brothers, Nuckolls, the Rushes, the Meaderds, the Shavers, the Gaines, Harry Bell, Revy Rhoades, the Nathans, Claude Hursey, Frank Dabney, the Thomases, the Ansons, and others. Who did they cater to? What were their problems? Were they successful? Why did they go out of business? What effect did entrepreneurship have on their families? What human interest stories can you find?

Only a few people remain who remember the Hoagland, Casey, and Sanders businesses. Information about these and other early businesses will soon be lost. Any original information you could collect would be important for our community to have.

Study of recent businesses would be useful also. What are some Black-owned businesses operating in Bloomington right now? What problems do small Black businesses face? How do they try to overcome their obstacles?

Al Nathan's Royal Palms Club was a tavern which served Black customers at 1105 West Washington Street in Bloomington for about three decades. Albert Nathan Sr. came to Bloomington from Tupelo, Mississippi in 1907 because of the railroad building boom. For a time, he worked at the David Davis mansion. Later, he helped build brick streets, and he



worked for the railroad. In the thirties, he ran a club on North Center Street called the Royal Palms. Then, he established the tavern on Washington Street. West Washington Street had a small satellite business district near the railway station and the old coal mines. Many of Nathan's customers were railroad workers. Also, the west side of Bloomington had a larger concentration of Black residents than did other areas.

Al Nathan Jr. recalled keeping the books for his father while he was still a high school student. At first, he worked with his father at both establishments. At some point, the downtown business was closed and its name was used at the west side place. Nathan's work at the tavern was interrupted by World War II. But after serving in Europe, he returned to help his aging father. Nathan continued to operate the Royal Palms until 1959.

Prior to World War II, Anna Clark ran a boarding house for Black I.S.N.U. students. For years, the student population at I.S.N.U. was much smaller than it is today. Earlier in the century, only white women could live in the dorms. But eventually white men began living in dorms, too. However, Black students still lived in Bloomington with its larger Black population or boarded with one of the few Black families in Normal. They were not allowed to live in the dormitories. Over the years, Mrs. Clark maintained contact with many of her former students, and she enjoyed following their successes in medicine, education, and other fields.

Several families in the area near Fell and Locust Streets regularly boarded Black students. Among these families were the Thomas families, Ansons, Headleys, Deans, and Simons.

In addition to the housing problem, African-American students weren't served in restaurants in Normal. In the 1930s, Luther and Lutie Anson opened a place called "The Chat and Chew," which gave Black students a place to have a soda and do some socializing. This small restaurant at 403 North Fell Street had a juke box and a few food items.

By 1950, only 76 of Normal's nearly ten thousand inhabitants were Black, and some of these were students. Perhaps fifty were permanent residents. However, in the sixties the university began to grow rapidly, and the percentage of Black students increased greatly in the seventies. In 1970, Normal's Black population was 442. Ten years later it was

2,180. By the seventies and eighties large numbers of students were living in the dorms and other student housing.

## Changes

From the Civil War period through the War in Vietnam, prolonged military conflict has brought upheaval and change in the United States. Some of these changes have been economic and technological. Changes in mores and lifestyle also have occurred in these unsettled times. Political and social attitudes have changed. Following the Civil War, Black men won the right to vote, and women increased their demands for that right. Following World War I, women finally got the vote. World War II was followed by a growing economy, quicker and easier transportation, improved communications, and a heightened expectation of improved material well-being. At the same time the racial inequalities in American life began to once again be exposed and publicly recognized. African-American involvement in the war effort both enhanced Black people's self-confidence and turned the spotlight on the everyday injustices that they had sometimes grown to life with.

When the United States declared war on Japan, African-Americans put on their national armor. They aided the war effort in the military, in the factories, and in their communities. At Bloomington High School on March 26, 1943, the Melody Gospel Chorus held its second annual Victory Program. The evening began with the "Star Spangled Banner" — America's national anthem. After intermission, the other half of the audience's double consciousness was addressed. Everyone sang "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Africans in America thought of themselves as Americans, but also were aware of their special experience as an identifiable ethnic group.

Several things about the program are of interest. It urged people to buy war bonds and stamps. In other words, help out at home through your financial support. It listed many ads. But unlike programs from African-American events in earlier periods, most of the supporting businesses were white-owned. It listed all the songs to be sung and named the soloists. These included the Rev. Hubert Able, Herchel Barksdale, Barbara Moore, Leona White, Roberta Dean, Carrie Wakefield, Clara Calimese, and Hazel Harber. The



program also made the claim that God was on our side, a claim frequently made by both parties at war. Finally, the same derogatory term used for our enemy by the white press during World War II was used in the program. The symbolism of placing the "Star Spangled Banner" before the "Negro National Anthem" was probably a fitting expression of the audience's feelings.

During World War II, Dolores Shavers joined other Bloomington citizens in doing volunteer work on the home front for the Price Administration. During the war years sugar, coffee, tires, and gasoline were rationed by the United States government. Dolores Shavers worked as a volunteer in the McLean County Court House, where she issued stamps to people who were in need of these items. Her job was to determine whether or not people were in real need. If she determined they were, she issued them stamps which allowed them to get a limited amount of the product. She did this volunteer work through most of the war years.

Conditions caused by World War II created opportunities for African-American workers. The loss of white workers into the military caused a worker shortage across the United States. Groups who had never been allowed to do factory work before were needed to meet the needs of wartime manufacturing. Black and female workers were hired. The worker shortage was coupled with the fact that because the United States government was paying factory owners to produce things, they had to abide by federal laws against discrimination in hiring practices. Eureka Williams received war contracts from the federal government. Therefore, the company began to hire Black workers for industrial jobs. Prior to this African-Americans had had only janitorial jobs there. Ruth Waddell was one of the workers hired under a war contract.

When the contracts ran out, Blacks lost their jobs. But a wedge had been slipped in the door. African-American workers had performed their jobs well. The memory of a better pay check and the fresh knowledge that they could do the job made it difficult to keep all the barriers against African-American employment up for long.

Around 1950, Black clerks began to work in some downtown stores. In January of 1950, a series of letters to the *Daily Pantagraph* commenting on the work of a sales clerk during the Christmas season reveal that it was rare to see a Black woman employed

outside of domestic service. Another letter expressed appreciation for the care received from the "three or four colored" nurses aides working at St. Joseph's Hospital.

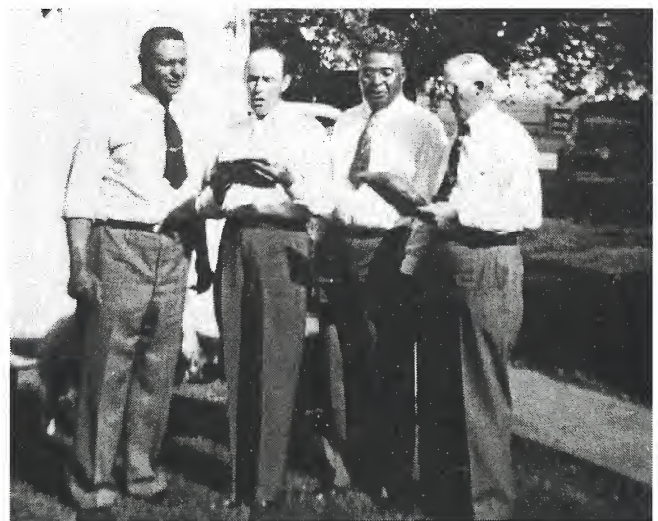
Again, Black soldiers had helped the United States win a major war. The color guard of the Redd-Williams



Redd-Williams American Legion Post Color Guard

American Legion Post celebrated our country's victory in World War II with a victory parade in front of the McLean County courthouse. The photograph of the event is thought to include Willis Stearles, George Stewart, Bruce Samuels, and Oscar Waddell.

The war economy brought the United States



Weedman Melody Men (Lucinda Posey Collection)



completely out of the Depression. Americans now looked forward to having more of the good things in life. Members of the Ward family in Bellflower had aged, and some brothers had passed away, but the family-based quartet continued to perform. Sometimes known as the Weedman Melody Men, the singers in the 1949 photo were Luther Ward, Don Rueger, Joe Ward, and G. L. Grimes. The quartet and their families got together at the homes of various members on Sunday afternoons to socialize.

Cracks in some of the exclusionary practices in Bloomington began to slowly occur. In the early fifties, Mary Hosea was the first Black cheerleader at Bloomington High School, and her brother, Don, was the first football captain there. When the cheerleaders went to a restaurant downtown after a game, all the cheerleaders except Mary would be served. The white cheerleaders would refuse their sodas and leave. Mary's experience at the movies was the same. Mary and all other African-Americans were made to sit in the balcony at the movies.

Segregation in restaurants continued into the 1950s. African-Americans still were not served in restaurants or diners in downtown Bloomington. To get food from these places a Black person had to go to the back or side door, make the purchase, and carry out the food. This policy caused hurt and inconvenience. One mother, whose skin color was light, sometimes ate at the dime store lunch counter when she was alone. When she took her children who were darker with her, she was told she couldn't eat there.

The absurdity and injustice of such policies was challenged by individuals from time to time. Various families have stories of one of their members getting tired of such treatment and refusing to leave. Sometimes individuals got served. When William Hosea came home from service in the early fifties and was refused service at Kresges, he said, "I will not leave. I will be served here today. I have been all over on a ship rocking, eating rotten food and stale bread, and then you tell me I can't eat here!" He waited until he was served.

In 1955, singer and actor William Warfield, who was known internationally for his role of Joe in the movie *Showboat*, was served in a Bloomington restaurant only after a screen was put up to separate him and his party from the white patrons. The Human Relations Commission reported at the time that only four restaurants out of more than fifty served people of all races (*Daily Pantagraph* June 19, 1955:3).

The major thrust for open employment in Bloomington came with the arrival of the General Electric Company. According to a knowledgeable observer, when General Electric came in 1955, "They did not make selective employment. They hired *people*.... I learned that the personnel man said, 'We come from New York, and we have shareholders in our company, and we could not let them come into any plant and not find Black workers.' So this really was the initiation of pretty much open employment in Bloomington."

Initially, the doors weren't exactly thrown wide-



Mary Hosea (third from left), Bloomington High School cheerleader, 1951



open at General Electric. Ruth Waddell, who had a decade earlier worked at Eureka-Williams during the war, applied for a factory job at GE. She waited and waited while others, who had applied with her, got hired. Eventually, she became angry and forcefully pursued the job. She called repeatedly, sat in the employment office on her off-days, and threatened not to leave until someone would talk to her about a job. It took incredible persistence, but she got the job.

Dick Bell ran a car body repair shop at 608 North Center Street in Bloomington after World War II. Bell had worked at Carl's Paint and Body Shop, but he built a small shop and went into business for himself. After he got established, he enlarged the shop. He eventually employed up to ten workers. He had both Black and white workers and customers. Bloomington's Black population was too small to support a car repair shop entirely by itself. In any case, many Black customers continued their previously held business relationships with white owners of repair shops.

Bell was a self-taught man. He took correspondence courses to learn what he couldn't learn from his everyday experiences. He and his wife paid their bills quickly, trying never to hold a loan for long. Rose Anna Bell kept the books and totaled the accounts each week. By staying out of debt, working very hard, and being very skilled and thrifty, Bell managed to be a successful business man against what seem like very difficult odds.

Dick Bell, also, operated an amusement park near Six Points Road for a short time in the fifties. Bell set up the amusement park on property he owned south of Forest Park. The park had Black and white employees and patrons. Pony rides were a big favorite of the Bell's granddaughter.

After a successful career in the body repair business, Bell bought a farm. Of course, there had once been Black farmers in McLean County. However, in the 1960s Richard Bell certainly was moving against the general migration pattern when he bought a farm about ten miles west of Bloomington on Six Points Road. He built a house on the farm, and he and his wife moved to the country where they raised corn, beans, and hogs. At one time, they had about three hundred hogs. His wife, Rose Anna, recalled worrying that he would get sleepy on the tractor, but their dog Rusty offered her comfort. She'd ask Rusty where "Papa" was, and the dog would point to the field where Bell was working.

Fighting many obstacles Louis Garrison became a licensed plumber working in Bloomington. He had done plumbing work with a Bloomington man, but was stopped from continuing because he had no license. Eventually, he went to Chicago to get a recommendation from a licensed plumber there. Once he had the recommendation, he took and passed the plumber's test.

After returning to Bloomington with a plumbing license, he became the first Black plumber in this area. He worked for banks, churches, the housing authority, and individuals. He even had business in the smaller towns within the area. He was known as a very hard worker and was a highly respected plumber in the Twin Cities. He helped two other well-known plumbers, Henry Brown and Luther Watson, get their licenses. It is believed that at one time Bloomington-Normal had more Black plumbers than any Illinois city outside of Chicago.

Gaston's barber shop is a long time Bloomington institution. The late Robert Gaston was a Bloomington barber for many years. In the early thirties, his family came from the South to Clinton, to work on the railroad. After serving in World War II, he came home to find that most of the jobs available to people of African descent were still janitorial jobs. So in 1961, he opened a barber shop at Center Street and Grove Street. Urban renewal took that building, and he moved to Normal. Over the years, he had to move several times.

Robert Gaston's business is continued today on North Main Street in Bloomington by his son Gary. Early in the century, there were many African-American businesses in Bloomington and Normal. The Gaston family has kept this tradition alive. Near the barber shop, the Blues recently opened a clothing shop featuring clothing for a young African-American clientele.

Over the years, the Bloomington branch of the NAACP has taken up the fight against discrimination. In response to worsening discrimination and continued lynching nation-wide, an interracial group had met during the centennial year of Abraham Lincoln's birth, 1909. Mob violence in Springfield, Illinois had been one event driving home the need for some action. Out of that 1909 meeting came the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, an organization committed to legal action to protect the rights of Blacks. Nonpartisan political efforts and



education of the national public were seen as means to achieve civil rights protection. A monthly publication, *The Crisis*, was printed and distributed to 80,000. By mid-century the NAACP had local units in nearly all of the states.

When the NAACP state convention was held in Bloomington in October, 1960, members conducted sympathy pickets against chain stores like Woolworth's which at the time refused to serve Black patrons at their lunch counters in many southern cities. In 1960, sit-ins and demonstrations in the South were receiving the attention of the whole nation. The NAACP protest was a symbolic one supporting those demonstrators in the South who were putting their lives in danger as they tried to integrate restaurants. Organizers of the convention took the opportunity to build support for the NAACP and to call attention to local conditions.

A newspaper editorial two days later (*Daily Pantagraph* Oct. 25, 1960) provoked a heated response from Naomi McClenney, host chairman of the 1960 NAACP conference. She railed against the slow progress being made in employment and housing, the distress urban renewal was causing, and the question of who was allowed by the media to be a voice for Black people (Oct. 30, 1960). The issues of the sixties had been announced.

The active branches of the United States military had been segregated until President Truman's desegregation order following World War II. Veteran's groups were segregated even longer. One of the goals of NAACP president Merlin Kennedy was to integrate the American Legion. The Black veterans group in Bloomington, the Redd-Williams Post, had been active since World War I. In 1966, the fact of its existence looked like an affront to equality. The Redd-Williams Post had been born out of segregation in the military and American life, as well as out of pride in service to the United States. Although strong attachments to the Post had formed, its existence was a reminder that Blacks were not welcome in the Louis E. Davis American Legion Post.

In 1965, David Casey and Robert Gaston Sr. tried to apply for membership in the all-white unit. Their fees and application were taken, but later the application was rejected and their fees returned.

In May of 1966, Merlin Kennedy tried unsuccessfully to file a letter of application to the all-white legion post. The receptionist allegedly told him, "We don't take colored here." This led to a protest at the

McLean County court house on the following Saturday. The newspaper article stated that there were fifty protesters (*Daily Pantagraph* May 29, 1966). The accompanying photo showed white and Black protesters of all ages.

Meanwhile, members of the white post had tried to quietly resolve the issue. Gerald Williams and the Rev. Ernest Norquist had gone to Western Avenue Community Center to give Kennedy an application, which Kennedy refused. Norquist, who had been trying previously to force the Davis American Legion Post to look at its racial policy, must have been frustrated that events were moving beyond him now.

Kennedy's goal was bigger than becoming a member of the white Legion Post. He wanted to demolish all forms of discrimination. Now Kennedy was looking forward to the Memorial Day parade. He and a group called US got their desired publicity as he attempted to join the parade under the banner, "Our war dead died together. Bloomington segregated their honor today."

In what today seems an odd related event, reporter James Engelhorn then tried to join the Redd-Williams Post. The headline for the accompanying news article read "Negro Legion Rebuffs White." But according to the article, Engelhorn went to the Legion room where there was only one person present. This unidentified person told Engelhorn to see the post commander, Ralph Doage. Later, Doage came down to the McBarnes building with a letter of application for Engelhorn.

This whole episode illuminates many of the issues related to desegregation in the Civil Rights Era. Merlin Kennedy's strategy was always to expose segregation and discrimination and to increase awareness of their implications and effects. Success depended, in part, on white people changing their position when faced with a moral choice that was clearly framed.

Naomi McClenney, who six years earlier complained in an opinion page letter about whites who spoke for Blacks, complained this time that Kennedy's action was not an action of the NAACP, but rather an action of an individual. As had happened elsewhere, events were moving faster than were the views and actions of the NAACP. Meanwhile, the *Daily Pantagraph* argued that Black institutions must be integrated, too. It seemed to totally miss the fact that many Black institutions were a response to long standing white



racism. Finally, the situation for older Black people, who had adapted to the conditions of their youth and who had struggled to make a life for themselves under those conditions, was unsettling. Willie Tripp noted that he was post commander and "that's a real honor." He realized that at his age he could probably not move into a responsible, fulfilling position in the white post. For people of his generation, there could be great personal loss if institutions that had enriched their lives were abolished.

The major forces which brought change to Bloomington happened elsewhere. The effects of the national Civil Rights Movement and the marches of Dr. Martin Luther King rippled down to Bloomington. Many older residents recalled the turmoil of the sixties in oral interviews. For many, the strongest memories were of events in the news. Images of Dr. King, civil rights marches, police dogs attacking marchers, James Meredith on incredibly lonely crusades. Those aspects of the civil rights struggle that television chose or was able to easily report were the events remembered.

Ultimately, those outside events contributed greatly to local change. One person born in the last century remembered the "time of the fires," the summer burnings in Detroit and Watts, as being the time when things began to change.

A Bloomington native, Sister Antona Ebo, joined Dr. King on his freedom march in Selma, Alabama. She was the first African-American Catholic nun to march with him. Sister Ebo was raised in Bloomington. Although as a teenager she converted to Catholicism partly in response to the hospital care nuns had given her, she was discouraged from seeking admission to the Catholic School of Nursing in Bloomington. She went to St. Louis and trained as a nurse there.

On February 11, 1966, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke to 3,000 people in Fred Young Field house at Illinois Wesleyan. Dr. King visited Bloomington twice. In 1961 he spent several days on Wesleyan's campus. During that visit Wesleyan's campus newspaper, the *Argus* recounted his role in the bus boycott struggle in Montgomery and reported his campus activities and speeches. Five years later, at a time when he was involved in northern housing issues and had just rented an apartment on Chicago's west side, he returned to speak to a crowd of 3,000. King was a world famous figure at this time. He had delivered the "I Have a Dream" speech three years earlier in Washington D. C. But racial polarization in



Sister Antona (Betty Ebo)

the north had increased by the time of his second visit and this was reflected in the minimal reporting of his speech by the editor of the campus newspaper.

At the time of his second visit, threats on his life were common so security at Wesleyan was tight as students, faculty, and townspeople crowded to hear him speak. Illinois Wesleyan University's student senate president, Dick Muirhead, recalled that he, as a student body leader, received hate mail and late night phone threats in what seemed to be part of an organized campaign of intimidation that followed Dr. King wherever he spoke. But King was not intimidated.

One person who heard Dr. King speak, Kathryn Dean, got his autograph. She saved it and had the Rev. King's daughter, the Rev. Bernice King, add her autograph to her father's program when she spoke at Illinois Wesleyan in 1991.

There had been individual protests against discrimination and acts of courage in Bloomington and Normal in the forties and fifties. Members of the YWCA had quietly worked against segregation. But in



the fifties more radical voices were heard. The Rev. George Jones at Wayman Church spoke with a more radical message. Many people with roots in the community were opposed to his ideas. It seems that to a degree the membership of the NAACP split on the issue of activism and confrontation. Bill Kennedy and his brother, Merlin Kennedy came to leadership in the local NAACP at a time of nationwide activism. Merlin Kennedy, president of the NAACP in the sixties, later recalled that his strategy had been to expose problems. The publicity he got in the press, of course, was unwanted by the city. Kennedy believes that because Bloomington officials did not want either a public "black eye" or the fires and turmoil that hit many large cities, the activities of the NAACP got the attention of the local power structure.

Merlin Kennedy attempted to join the Christmas parade in 1966 as Santa Claus. This effort to challenge the idea that Santa Claus had to be white was fought by parade officials, but the national news service picked up the story. Actions like this helped jar loose notions about what roles Blacks could engage in.

Involvement in civil rights activities was not without costs to Beluah and Merlin Kennedy. Petty cash for running NAACP activities often came out of their pockets. Mr. Kennedy was not threatened with job loss, but he lost wages when he took time from his job to pursue NAACP business. Worst of all were threats and abusive phone calls. Kennedy appreciated the fact that the FBI sent an agent to offer him protection at one particularly tense time.

Another group began working with the NAACP in the late sixties. US, which included whites like Ralph Smith, George Warren, Francis Irvin, and Jack Porter, apparently gave people active with the NAACP flexibility in dealing with local conditions because it didn't need to work through the layers of NAACP procedures. Open housing was high on the agenda of this group. Demonstrations were called to expose the difficult time Black people had finding a place to live. White couples were sent to "test" whether or not they could rent or buy homes that had been refused to African-Americans. Shortly after this, Bloomington passed an open housing ordinance.

Following the deaths of students at Kent State and Jackson State Universities in 1970, fires were set and fights broke out over the display of the American flag on the I.S.U. campus. Bloomington-Normal had

remained relatively quiet during what is thought of as the turbulent sixties. But if we remember carefully, the last couple of years of the sixties and the first several years of the next decade were really the radical times. Disturbances hit the I.S.U. campus in May, 1970, after four young people were shot at Kent State University in Ohio during a large campus protest. Nationwide the African-American community was upset about the death of students at Jackson State University, but the shooting of Black Panther leaders Mark Clark and Fred Hampton by Chicago police during the previous winter seemed to be a more immediate concern of Black students at I.S.U.

I.S.U. President Samuel Braden called for the lowering of the flag for four days in honor of the four youths killed at Kent State. Additionally, the flag was to be lowered on May 19 to honor Malcolm X. Then, two more days were added for the Chicago Panther leaders. This was too much for some "red-blooded" Americans, including one convicted felon, who took it upon themselves to raise the flag.

Marches, meetings, fires, and threats filled the air in the following days. Feelings were very polarized. Not all students were radical. Far from it. In fact, at



Outside agitators on the I.S.U. campus, May, 1970 (Pantagraph File)



one meeting four to five thousand people gathered at McCormick Gymnasium for a patriotic rally. Only 650 students had marched in protest of the shootings. But in the charged atmosphere politically-active African-American and white students who just a few years earlier had worked together found it harder to continue working together.

At Bloomington High School there were riots in mid-May over alleged rude behavior at a school assembly. Some white students took offense to the content of an African-American Club Assembly. Perhaps they simply took offense to the idea of the club itself. Fifty students walked out of the assembly, and a fight ensued. The unrest on the university campuses over war issues and race issues created a climate that wasn't conducive to a quiet resolution of racial tensions at the high school. The end of the semester came, and the disruption stopped. Not all was resolved though.

Although great changes seemed to be occurring in society, churches continued to play a central role in the lives of Black people. The Loving Missionary Baptist Church was formed in October, 1969, and first met at Western Avenue Community Center. In 1973, the congregation purchased the Moses Montefiore Temple. This beautiful building had been designed by George Miller and built by mason August Laufer in the nineteenth century. The structure was based on the design of a famous Berlin building which was destroyed during World War II. In 1980, a tower was blown off Loving Missionary Baptist Church during a storm.

This building is an excellent example of *sequent occupancy*. From 1889 until 1959, the Moses Montefiore Temple was the home of a Jewish congregation. Notice the star of David in the stained glass window. It served a Protestant congregation for ten years before becoming home to Loving Missionary Baptist Church. Recently it has been sold as a private residence to an individual who is presently restoring the tower and roof.

Yearbooks from the early 1970s show that Black Student Union members at Illinois Wesleyan displayed their pride in their African-American heritage with their "Afros" — a very popular hairstyle among the young. Today's students might have a hard time relating to this assertion of Black pride. They might not understand this rejection of hair straightening as an attempt to "look white." If you can

find a copy of James Brown's recording "I'm Black and I'm Proud" for students, you can listen to the message and the beat that the 1973 college students listened to in high school. It was a time of liberation from feeling the need to imitate the majority culture.

Census data shows that the Black population of Normal increased greatly in the seventies. This was largely a result of the rapid student population growth at I.S.U. The entire university grew, but the Black student population growth was significant in the total picture.

In the late sixties, Wesleyan began to make an effort to recruit Black students by visiting Chicago schools. As a result, the number of Black students at the private Bloomington university increased substantially in the seventies. In the eighties, Black enrollment in both universities declined slightly.

Many students know individuals or groups who sing locally. Perhaps less well-known are two outstanding musical performers whose roots are local. John Waddell is from an old Bloomington family. He attended local schools and graduated from I.W.U. before going on to sing in Germany, New York, and across the United States. One of his early teachers recalled that when he first worked with John's high school group, John was not necessarily the best singer. But he was always extremely hard-working and determined. In 1992, he returned to Bloomington and performed *Living for the Cause of Freedom*, a one man music-drama of the life of Paul Robeson.

A younger resident from Normal is the classical pianist, Awadagin Pratt. His parents came to Normal to teach at I.S.U. They had very high expectations for him and his sister, Menah. Neighbors remember the early morning tennis practices conducted by his father on Normal's west side, and college students remember the hard work mother and son put in on campus. In 1992, Pratt won the Naumberg International Piano Competition becoming the first African-American pianist to win an international competition. This thrust him into the national limelight and paved the way for several very busy seasons. He has even played at the White House. Although he had been winning rave reviews and gaining attention nationally and internationally, he returned home in September, 1994 for another Normal concert. This time he played a benefit concert for the Children's Foundation and the I.S.U. music department. The Pratt Music Council, founded in memory of his late father, Dr. T.A.E.C.



Pratt, provides scholarships for local children to study classical music at Illinois Wesleyan University.

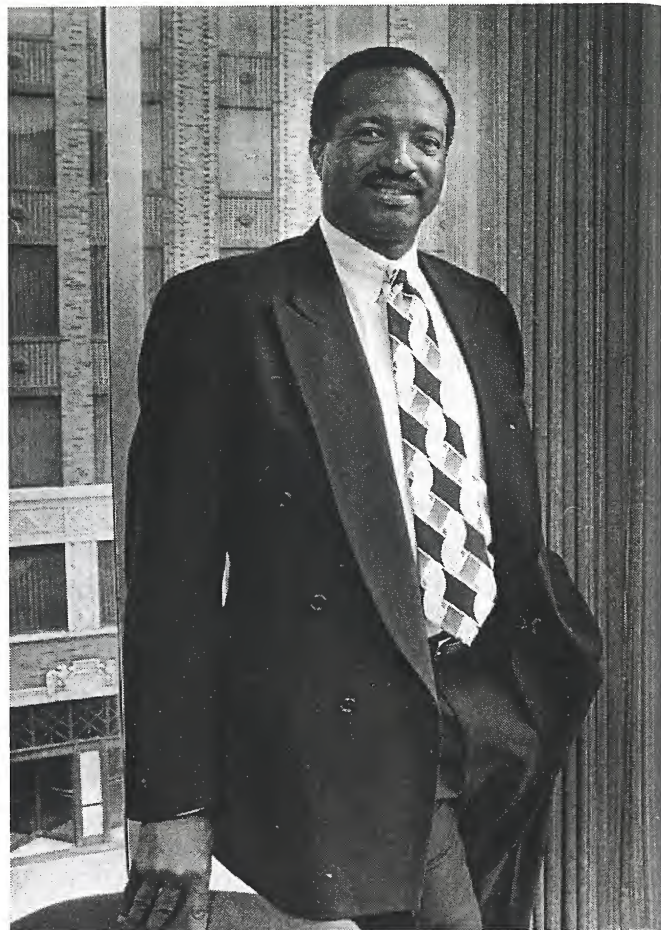
In 1979, ex-school board president Eva Jones became the first Black member of Bloomington's city council. She first ran for city council in 1970 as one of ten candidates. She was unsuccessful in her initial campaign, but nine years later she edged out Art Foreman and joined Jesse Smart on the city council. That same May, her husband, Jimmie, was making history by umpiring a major league baseball game.

In between the two runs for council, Eva Jones was elected to the District 87 school board and served from 1971 to 1978. She served a term as board president in the late seventies.



Eva Jones (Pantagraph File)

Born in Chicago, Carl Sneed grew up in Bloomington. His schooling was interrupted by military service during the Vietnam War. He returned to the Twin Cities and completed his master's degree in political science at Illinois State University. From 1973 until July, 1975, Sneed was assistant city manager in the Town of Normal. Confidence in the abilities of this young official was so great that he was appointed acting city manager when City Manager David Anderson left his



Carl Sneed (Pantagraph File)

position for a temporary assignment. In 1978, he joined Champion Federal Savings and Loan in a move that allowed him to stay in the Twin Cities and yet advance in his career. Happily, he didn't have to move elsewhere in order to take on more responsibilities and aspire to increased earnings, as had so many African-Americans in earlier generations. Sneed became senior vice-president of First of America Mortgage Company and is currently its president.

Donald McHenry graduated from I.S.U. In the late seventies, when President Jimmy Carter was under heavy pressure to replace United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young, he turned to McHenry, who filled the politically difficult position with great diplomacy. Viewers of serious news television programs have heard McHenry display board knowledge and reveal a thorough understanding of complex international issues.

The national civil rights advances of the sixties, passage of a local open housing ordinance, and improving educational and employment opportunities



were reasons for optimism among African-Americans in Bloomington. Not since Reconstruction had so much progress been made. Not everything was ideal, of course, but the general direction in which things were moving was positive. In 1975, plumber Henry Brown, a civic and church leader talking about 1950 said, "No one bothered you; neither did anyone bother about you. You were just there, unnoticed" (*Daily Pantagraph* Jan. 1, 1975). He went on:

*Then in the sixties, without demonstration or confrontation, things began to happen. Teachers were placed in the school system. Blacks were placed in the universities in administration and as instructors.... In 1974 Bloomington had in its employment Aaron Vessup as human relations coordinator: the McLean County Planning Commission hired Richard Cox as associate planner, and the Bloomington Housing Authority has Mrs. Dorothy Stewart as assistant director and the Town of Normal had Carl Sneed as assistant city manager. Peoples Bank of Bloomington has two Black tellers... State Farm has placed many Blacks in white collar positions, including two men with law degrees. The telephone company, the light company, Illinois Agricultural Association, General Electric, the gas company, Beich candy company, Eureka, Firestone, Modine and many others have Blacks on their payrolls. To Black people it can be said, 'You have come a long way, baby, and you have a long, long way to go'.*

In the twenty years that have passed since Henry Brown's observation, African-Americans have continued to make progress. More Black people are in positions of decision-making. Black families have moved into affluent neighborhoods. Although we still have cases of gross discrimination against minority renters, much greater opportunity to compete for housing city-wide is afforded Black residents today. Many families have significantly higher relative incomes than was the case in the sixties.

Yet, too many African-Americans don't have that

hope of twenty years ago. The gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" is widening. College costs have skyrocketed. Many families, in fact, face declining incomes. Wages in many sectors of the economy have not kept pace with inflation. Apathy, drug use, teen-pregnancy, and crime seem to have increased.

Problems that are sweeping the nation have appeared in Bloomington-Normal. Concern about our social, educational, economic, and moral condition is frequently expressed. However, a growing body of people seems to be emerging to help address many of these problems. Students are helping as tutors. There are outreach programs to prisons. Habitat for Humanity has a very active local organization. The Boys and Girls Club is firmly established. The W.E.A.R.E. group had made a difference in the lives of individual youngsters. The Coalition for Diversity and Reconciliation has been promoting area wide activities to increase racial understanding. Talented young people are performing concerts of classical piano music and classical Indian dance in order to raise money for community programs. These are but a sample of things that volunteers are doing in our community today.

We can look, too, to our elders for inspiration. For people of Caribel Webster Washington's generation, the Depression awaited them upon graduation. They had been nurtured and raised in a somewhat better economic time, but the realities that faced them as they left school were daunting. Their problems were basic.

But they didn't give up. In fact, they started the modern movement for basic American rights. It may be hard for some younger people to appreciate today, but Mrs. Washington's job opportunities were for a long time limited to working as a maid. Despite her reading, writing, and speaking skills, excellent general knowledge and her organizational and leadership abilities, racial prejudice denied her work in stores or offices. Because of this prejudice, she couldn't go into a restaurant and have lunch. She couldn't sit on the first floor of a movie theater in Bloomington-Normal.

Nearly half a century ago, she worked to integrate tea rooms. For years, she worked with churches to open lines of communication and interaction among Black and white Americans. Fiercely independent, she has used her considerable powers of persuasion to help remove barriers for others. In her retirement years, she





**Caribel Webster Washington**

has kept right on working. Just three years ago, Caribel Washington labored, in hot, humid summer weather every day for two weeks to ensure that archaeology work could be done at Wayman Church. Despite the physical strain, she would not allow the opportunity to learn more about her historic church's past slip away. Mrs. Washington remains vigilant and continues to speak up when wrongs are done. She knows that gains made yesterday can not be taken for granted and that each generation must do its part. Although she didn't have the opportunity to enjoy years of high salaries which could be put away for retirement years, she is determined to do what she can so that today's young people are not put at an economic disadvantage because of their race. We have much to learn from Mrs. Washington and from many others of her generation.



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